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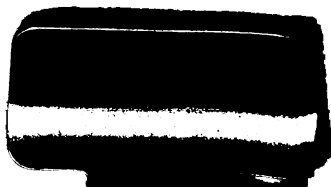
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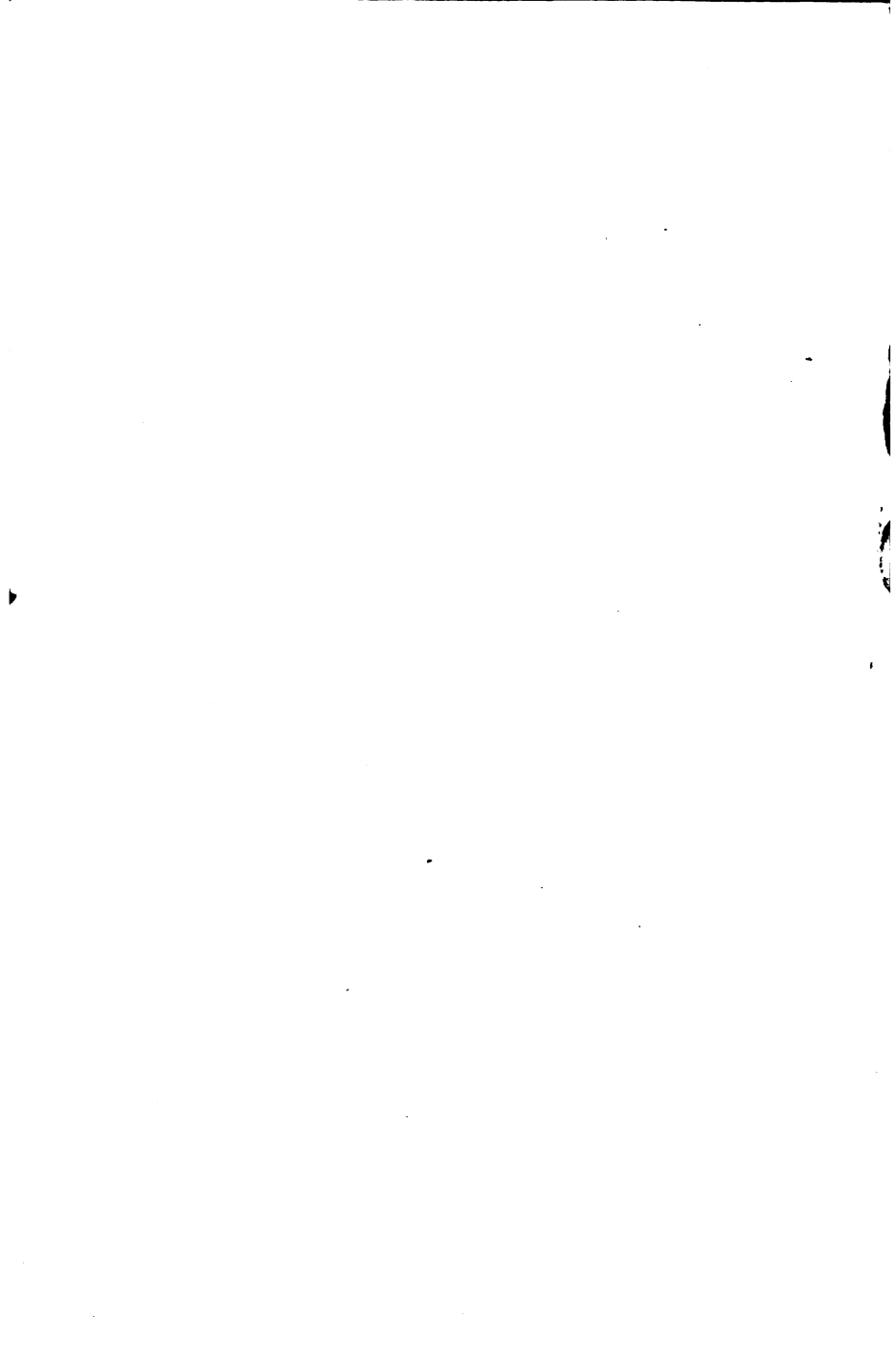
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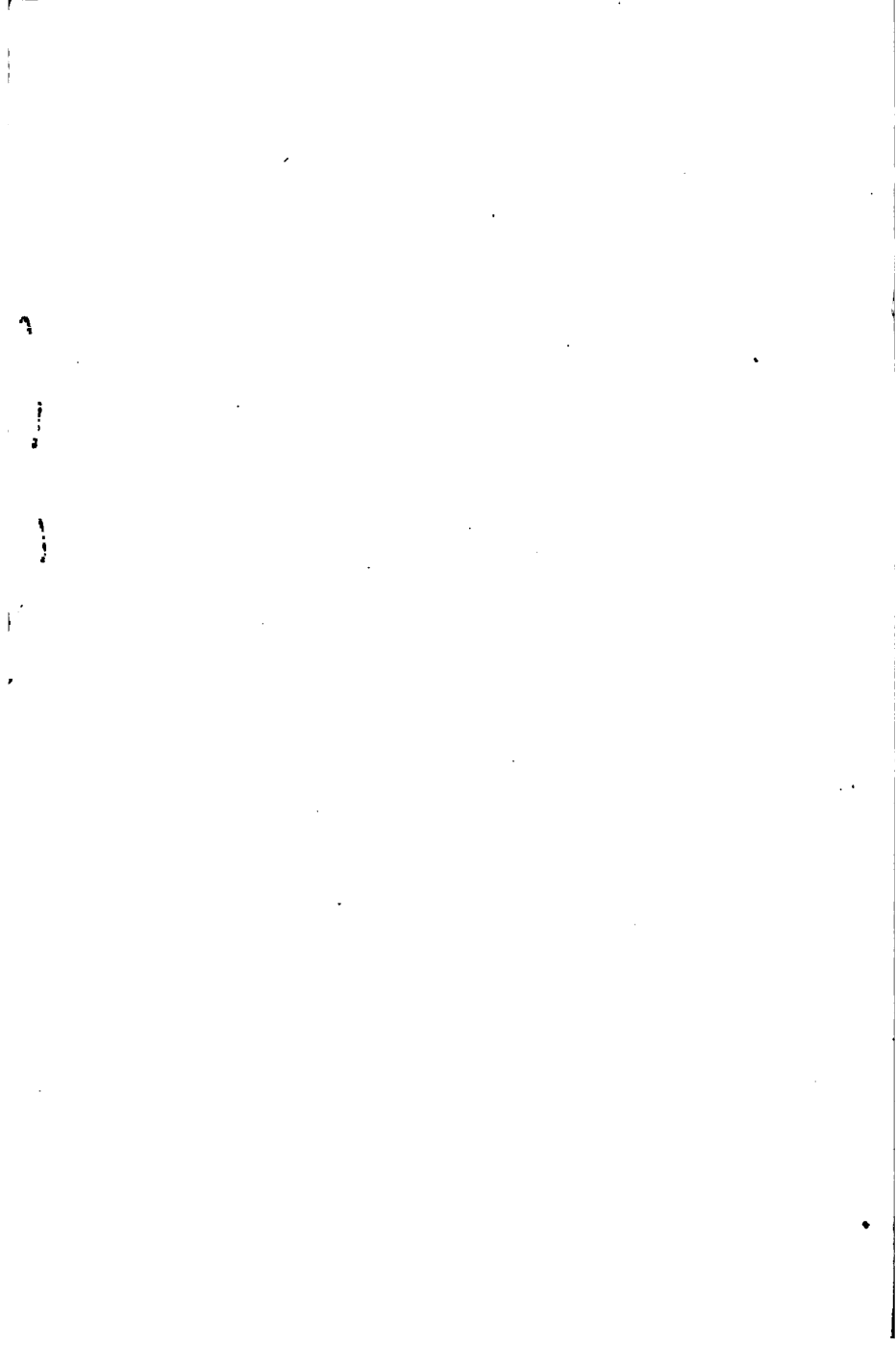


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SADDLE AND SABRE.

SADDLE AND SABRE.

A Novel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART

AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANGTON," "FROM POST TO FINISH,"
"BAD TO BEAT," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SADDLE AND SABRE.

CHAPTER I.

BELLATON WOLD.

THE wind whistled shrill across the Yorkshire wolds this March evening, but at that time of night there were few wayfarers about to suffer from its bleakness. Here and there a belated shepherd might have been seen hurrying to some hamlet nestling at the foot of the hills, or some stalwart farmer making a short cut to the snug house that called him master. A little

distance below a species of plateau, well known as a famous training-ground, stood a many-gabled well-thatched farmhouse. It was about the ordinary-sized dwelling that a well-to-do yeoman, who cultivated his own land, might be supposed to inhabit. By no means a large house, or a house of any pretence, remarkable only for one thing, the rather extensive range of stabling that stood around it. There was accommodation for many more horses than the tiller of such a farm would require. A bright light penetrating through the chinks of the shutters of a latticed window on the ground-floor suggested the idea of warmth and a comfortable fireside within. Using the privilege of Asmodeus, we peep inside the parlour and see two men seated on either side of the glowing hearth, with a table well supplied with spirits and water. Alas! too well supplied for one of them.

“ Yes, Mr. Slade, I’ve been main bad. I can’t stand the winters as I used to do, and

the gout lays hold of me terrible now at times."

The speaker was a little dark, very dark, wiry man, with eyes like gimlets, whose countenance bore the traces of recent indisposition.

"You ought to be a bit more careful," replied Norman Slade. "It's no use, Bill, the old 'uns can't live with the young ones; you can't expect to take your liquor freely overnight and turn out to ride trials in the keen morning air, now you've got within the forties, without feeling it."

"Now don't you preach, Mr. Slade," rejoined Bill Smith, testily. "I should like to know what a man's to do when he can't get about to look after his horses. He must take a drop to comfort him; horses indeed! such a lot as they are too. I don't believe there's one of them worth a row of gingerbread. I tried my two-year-olds last October and a pretty moderate lot they are.

No chance of their doing any good as three-year-olds."

"You will have to get rid of them in selling-races," rejoined Slade, flipping the ash from his cigar. "I suppose they're good enough to do you a turn there."

"Well, I should hope so," growled the other, as he took a gulp of a mahogany-coloured mixture which no doctor would have dreamt of recommending for gout; "however, I shall be about again in a few days now, and then I must put 'em through the mill again and see what they're really fit for."

Bill Smith's was a common enough case; a man who now passed a good deal of his time between drinking-bouts and severe attacks of the gout. One of the finest horsemen in England, he had at an early age established himself as one of the crack jockeys of the day. "Formidable at Epsom, invincible at Doncaster, and dangerous anywhere," had been the comment on his

riding, only a few years back, by one of the shrewdest judges of racing on the turf.

Cast by nature in a light mould, he was exempt from a great deal of the abstinence and privation that forms so prominent a part of a jockey's life. Always a free liver, and of a convivial disposition, he had latterly allowed his craving for strong waters to get the upper hand of him. It began to be whispered about that "Black Bill," as he was called by his brother jockeys, was very often "half-cocked" when he got up to ride. It was some time before the fact became generally recognised. The man could ride as well half-drunk as sober, save in one respect; and it is just that which invariably cuts short the career of a jockey who takes to drinking; namely, that in the critical moments of a race he lost his head. Instead of taking advantage of every point in the game, he failed to note what his antagonists were doing; he got muddled; he timed his rush either too soon or too late. That

deadly rush of his, for which he had once been so famous, and which had snatched so many races out of the fire on the very post, was now wont to be delivered at the wrong time. He who had been wont to measure his supreme effort to the very stride, now either won his race two lengths before the chair, or perhaps the same distance the other side of it; but he failed to win at the winning-post. Gradually his riding fell away from him; owners naturally ceased to employ a jockey upon whose sobriety there was no dependence. The same pitiless authority whom we have quoted above as giving such a laudatory opinion of Bill Smith's riding, now said "that he threw away more races than any man in England." The great stable of the North, which had held first claim on his services for many years, had now withdrawn its patronage; and the world generally frowned upon the once-famous jockey. Still, every now and then he astonished the turfites by a bit of bril-

liant riding worthy of his best days. It was evident that his right-hand had not lost its cunning, nor his nerve failed him; and that, if only he could keep from drink, the man was as fine a horseman as ever. Ah! the infinite conjectural probabilities of those ifs!

Bill Smith took the neglect of his old patrons bitterly. That he had lost the greater part of his business soured the man. True, it was from his own fault; and in his own breast he most likely acknowledged that it was so; but it rarely happens that upon these occasions a man does not put his own sins upon other people, and think all the more hardly of them on that account. In his palmy days, too, Bill Smith had been arrogant and coarse of speech to most of the turf officials with whom he came in contact; a bully amongst the younger jockeys; and a very unscrupulous rider, to say the least of it, amongst those of his own standing. A man like this has not many friends

when the tide turns against him; and, though his brethren of the saddle were chary yet of provoking the rough side of "Black Bill's" tongue, they made no disguise of their satisfaction when he threw a race away in consequence of his besetting failing. Two of his old friends there were who stood staunchly to him, in spite of his transgressions; and these were Norman Slade and Sir Ronald Radcliffe.

"I can't quarrel with the old fellow, Norman," Sir Ronald had observed after one of Bill Smith's later fiascos. "He's put me in for too many good things in his time for that, but I'll back him no more. He simply threw that last race away by coming too late."

It would have been well for Sir Ronald if he had adhered firmly to that resolution.

"Well," said Slade, after a pause of some minutes, "very little sleep does for me as a rule, but I feel tired to-night, and, as you know, when in the country am always an

early man in the morning. I think I'll be off to bed. Shall you be out with the horses to-morrow morning?"

"No," returned the jockey. "I'm not rid of this confounded gout yet, and I am especially ordered to be careful about taking cold. You had better wrap well up, for you'll find the air confounded keen on the wolds."

"I know all about it," rejoined Slade. "I suppose I shall find Tom Parrott in charge?"

"Yes, he is a right good lad is Tom. I don't know how I should get on without him, for I've been able to look after the horses very little all this winter. Sure you won't have anything more before you go?"

"No; good night," rejoined Slade, as he picked up a hand-candlestick off the side-board, "and I hope the enemy will let you sleep to-night. When you come down to breakfast I shall be able to tell you what I think of the three-year-olds."

Bill Smith replied with a grimace, and turning to the fire observed as Norman left the room, "There's mighty cold comfort in that."

A little before eight the next morning saw Norman Slade attired in breeches, gaiters, stout boots, and shooting-jacket, plodding up the winding road that led to the plateau. There, walking up and down, clothed in their rugs, were some half-score horses bestrode by stable-boys, the whole evidently under the control of a little man riding a clever-looking pony, and who, though he was every day of five-and-thirty, was perhaps better known by the *soubriquet* of Bill Smith's head lad than by his legitimate appellation of Tom Parrott. The string, with one or two exceptions, were the property of Bill Smith himself, for few people cared to intrust the preparation of their horses to a man with Bill's unfortunate reputation. If he could not curb his propensity for strong waters when such urgent

call upon his faculties was demanded as on the race-course, was it like that he would put any check upon himself on the training-ground? and the turf, like all other professions, requires sobriety among its votaries.

Tom Parrott cantered briskly towards Norman the minute he saw him striding across the grand expanse of springy turf. It was not that he was going to do anything that all the world might not have seen, but he had all the instinctive jealousy of most trainers at finding his charges watched in their work.

"Mr. Slade!" he exclaimed, as he recognised his visitor. "Blamed if I didn't think it was one of those woundy touts. Not, I am sorry to say, that we have anything worth their spying about, but I can't abide the varmin."

"Glad to see you looking so well, Tom," rejoined Norman. "No, Mr. Smith told me last night you had nothing in the string that you had any hopes of. 'Tis so, some-

times, the stable gets clean out of form, and hasn't a horse in training good enough to win a saddle and bridle. Next year luck changes, and you sweep the board. What work are you going to give 'em this morning?"

"Well, they'll do a little slow cantering, and then old Knight-of-the-Whistle will lead the three-year-olds a smart mile spin. It's time to get on with them, you see, Mr. Slade; if they're ever to addle their keep, they ought to begin at the Newmarket Spring Meetings."

"Just so," said Norman "You use the old gallop, I suppose? I shall go and stand about half up the rise at the finish, and then I shall see them well extended."

"Can't do better, sir," replied Parrott; and, turning his pony short round, he cantered back to his charges.

Slade made his way to the coign of vantage he had mentioned, unshipped his glasses, and gazed lazily at the horses, as on

the other side of the down they went through some slow exercise. Presently he saw four of them walk quietly down to the mile-post, and knew that he was about to see the cream of Bill Smith's lot gallop. There was no keener race-goer than Norman Slade. No man more thoroughly loved racing for sheer sport; he could be as deeply interested in the issue of a trial on those Yorkshire wolds as on the result of the Derby; but still, it was with languid curiosity he awaited the forthcoming gallop. There could be little interest in seeing a few notoriously bad horses scurry over their mile in an exercise-gallop. Suddenly his attention was aroused; before the quartet had gone a quarter of a mile he could see that the second, a slashing big brown colt, had got his head up, and was fighting with his rider. Another few seconds, and, dropping his head, he makes an angry snatch at the bridle, bolts out of the Indian file in which they are galloping, tears

past old Knight-of-the-Whistle, and comes thundering along the gallop by himself.

“Got clean away with the lad,” muttered Norman, as he watched the boy throw himself right back in his saddle, and strive in vain to check his horse; “but what on earth does old Bill mean by saying his three-year-olds are no good? If that’s not a galloper I never saw one. What a stride he has! and how well he brings his quarters under him now he is really going.”

In vain the boy pulled; the big brown colt had completely overpowered him, and was bent upon doing a gallop entirely on his own account that morning. Norman watched him keenly as he swept past him, breasting the slight ascent like a lion, and going a good quarter-of-a-mile past the termination of the gallop before his rider succeeded in pulling him up; he did so at last, and turned his mount a little ruefully to walk back. “It’s well,” he muttered, “that Parrott is

in charge this morning instead of old Bill himself." Although it is at times impossible to prevent it, yet trainers look with considerable disfavour at a boy who lets his horse get away with him; and with a violent-tempered, coarse-tongued man like Bill Smith such mistake was met with a volley of abuse. By this time Tom Parrott had joined Slade, and, walking his pony alongside of him, they both proceeded to meet the culprit.

"Well, you young duffer," exclaimed Parrott, "what possessed you to let him get his head up like that? You might have known that he would twitch the bit out of your hands directly he dropped it again. Now don't say you couldn't help it. In the first place, you should have helped it; and in the second place, if I thought you could have helped it, you'd get your walking ticket this afternoon;" with which rather contradictory rebuke Mr. Parrott closed his lecture.

“Stop a moment, boy,” said Slade, authoritatively; “I want just to look your horse over;” and Norman’s practised eye at once took keen stock of the colt’s under-standings.

“Can’t see much of him here, Tom, but I’ll have a good look at him in the stable, where you can strip him for me; his legs look sound enough.”

“Oh, he’s sound as a bell,” rejoined Parrott; “if he was only as good as he is sound he’d do.”

“What do you call him, and how is he bred?”

“Belisarius, by Triumph, out of Darkness,” rejoined Parrott, laconically.

“As stout blood as any in England,” remarked Norman; “and what’s more, ‘Tom, as fine a mover as I’ve seen gallop for some time. Mr. Smith told me last night that he had tried all his three-year-olds good for nothing. Do you mean to tell me that brown colt was in the trial?”

"Yes, sir," replied Parrott, "and well beaten off."

"Well, Tom," said Slade, "did you see the colt go this morning? Can you shut your eyes to that? Who rode him in the trial?"

"One of the boys," replied Parrott. "I forget at this moment which, but I can easily ascertain."

"Do, Tom, as soon as you get back. I'll lay pounds to crowns the trial's all wrong. I'll come round and have a look at Belisarius in his box after breakfast." And with that Slade strode away down the hill to satisfy the keen appetite that a morning on the wolds is wont to induce. "It's all nonsense," he said to himself as he stepped smartly out in the direction of the farmhouse. "That trial was all wrong, I'll lay guineas to gooseberries; old Bill was most likely too ill to superintend it himself, and, at all events, no doubt, never rode in it. Tom Parrott's a good head boy, but putting

horses together is a little beyond him. If Bill had ridden in it he would have known what every horse in it was doing. As it is, I fancy Belisarius is a great big lazy colt that takes a deal of getting out. I don't suppose any of them ever saw him gallop till this morning. Well, come, I'm going to have a more amusing week than I reckoned on. I've at all events found out something to do. I've got to discover the rights of that trial, to induce Bill to try them again, and also to ascertain whether that big brown colt is entered for any stakes worth winning."

CHAPTER II.

TRIAL OF BELISARIUS.

As Norman entered the house his host called out to him from the parlour, "Is that you, Mr. Slade? Come along in, and we'll have breakfast up in a twinkling. I feel more like myself this morning than I have done for some time; the talk with you last night did me good."

"Glad to hear it," replied Norman, "I'll just run upstairs and wash my hands and be with you in less than five minutes."

No sooner had Slade entered his bedroom than he dashed at once to his portmanteau, and eagerly took from it a volume of the calendar bearing the title of "Races to

Come." He turned over the leaves quickly. Yes, there it was, Belisarius, by Triumph, out of Darkness. It didn't take Slade's practised eye long to run over the horse's engagements. "By heavens!" he exclaimed, "if I should prove right, and my opinion be confirmed at the subsequent trial, I've discovered a veritable gold-mine. Here's a three-year-old entered for all the big races of the year whose name has never been even whispered among racing-men, who has never run, and whose very owner regards him as good for nothing. Now this is real fun. If we have got hold of a flyer, what a dressing we will give those south country stables. As for money, we can win as much as we please over him. Properly worked, Radcliffe, Bill, and myself may stand to win perfect fortunes with very little risk." And so saying Norman Slade went down stairs to breakfast.

"Well! Mr. Slade," exclaimed the jockey, as Norman entered the parlour, "I hope

you found an appetite upon the moor if you found nothing else. I suppose you saw all my rubbish."

"Rubbish, are they!" ejaculated Norman, "perhaps so. I wonder what you'd take for the three three-year-olds Knight of the Whistle led in their gallop this morning?"

"Have you got a commission?" inquired the jockey, eyeing his guest keenly. "If you have you may take those three for a monkey, and I shall think myself well out of them."

"Well, Bill, you take my advice, don't you be in a hurry to part with those three for five hundred until you know a little more about them. How did you try them last back end?"

"They had a six-furlong spin with old Knight of the Whistle, as true a trial horse as ever was foaled. Two of 'em were tried at weight for age, but Belisarius I rather fancied, so I put him in at seven pounds less. The

horse cleaned out the lot, and as for my fancy, he finished last of all."

"You neither saw it nor rode in it, I suppose," rejoined Slade.

"I certainly didn't ride in it, and I only half saw it. I was very ill, and it was a very misty day, and I left the management of the whole thing to Parrott."

"Well, then," retorted Slade, "I maintain your trial is no trial at all, and that you know nothing about your own young ones."

"You're a very tidy judge, Mr. Slade, and know a bit what you're speaking about," rejoined the jockey, not a little nettled, "but if you think you can learn me my business you are confoundedly mistaken."

"Never supposed I could teach you anything, Bill," replied Norman, perfectly unmoved, "but no man ever lived who didn't make a mistake at times; and he never did so without there being a looker-on with half his brains who could point it out to him."

If you had been well enough to ride in it yourself, I should look upon that trial as conclusive. You weren't, and I look upon it as all skittles."

"I know what I'm about," rejoined the jockey sulkily. "I'll come to you when I want to know the time of day, thank you; in the meantime you can't say you're invited to risk money on anything of mine."

"Now, do listen to reason, Bill," rejoined Norman quietly, "don't say anything now, just turn it over in your mind. Give me three or four days to worm out what I can about that trial. You have got nothing to do, remember, but to get well, and just before I leave you get on that brown colt, and see whether Knight of the Whistle can give him twenty-one pounds over a mile."

At first the jealous irritable old jockey bluntly refused, said that he had satisfied himself about the brutes, that he was not going to trouble himself to get into the saddle to see how far Belisarius was behind

a good horse, that Slade had better not waste his time in the experiment of turning Yorkshire geese into Epsom swans; but in his innermost heart Bill Smith began to ponder over what his guest had said; he knew that Norman Slade was a really right good judge of a thoroughbred. He had had in the first instance a great opinion of Belisarius himself, and in his best days the man's natural egotism had invariably prompted him to little belief in a trial in which he had not taken part. No man had more often expressed his disbelief in the issue of what he designated a "mooddling gallop," and he was forced to admit that this trial of his might strictly be described as such. As for Slade, he was much too clever a man of the world to touch upon the subject for a couple of days. He was up every morning to see Belisarius do his work, and the more he saw of him the more convinced he was that he was a good horse. He had got hold of the boy who

rode him in that rough Yorkshire gallop at the back end of last year, and by dint of bribery, cajolery, and intimidation, had at last wrung from him the confession that he had been so bad with boils on that occasion as to be perfectly unfit to ride, and quite unable to do justice to his horse.

Norman Slade communicated his discovery to Smith, who received the intelligence with a savage execration, and a muttered growling, in which strong expletives and such terms as "Break every bone in his body," "Cut the little devil in two," &c. were alone audible; but Slade eventually smoothed him down, and pleaded that he had pledged himself the boy should go scatheless if he told the whole truth. "Besides," urged Norman, "it's no use thrashing him for his sins of five or six months back, the poor little beggar will doubtless commit himself again before long."

The jockey burst out laughing. "Well, Mr. Slade," he cried, "you are an ingenious

advocate, but I'd as lief you weren't arguing for my defence. Don't hang him now, because you'll have another chance before long. Well, there's something in it; and I promise to let the young villain off this time."

"Thanks, it's very likely all for the best, nobody has the faintest idea that you hold a trump card in your hand. I want you to have another spin with them Saturday morning, and ride Belisarius yourself—it'll do you more good than all the doctors Bill if you find him what I think; don't ask him to do a heartbreaking thing, but still let us ask Belisarius the question in real earnest."

"Right you are, Mr. Slade; I shall be perpetually on the fidget till I know the worst, as old John Day always puts it."

There was an eager discussion that night at dinner between Slade and his host as to what weights should be apportioned to Knight of the Whistle and Belisarius. The

Knight was a five-year-old, who from his youth upwards had always been a fairly good horse. He was by no means first class, and his chief merit lay in his being a consistent performer. If he didn't win when he was expected still he was always there or thereabouts; and on the training-ground, as Bill Smith always said, you might thoroughly depend on what a gallop with him told you as regarded the young ones. Slade insisted upon it that if Belisarius could beat the old horse, in concession of a stone, it would be quite good enough for the present, and then it would be time enough to try him a little higher later on, whilst Smith was for asking the sterner question at once. However, after much discussion, Slade's proposition was agreed to, and it was determined that the trial should come off on the Saturday morning.

Eight o'clock on that day consequently saw the little group gathered together at the mile-post as on the first morning

Slade had gone up to the moor, with this rather important difference, that old Bill Smith himself, his throat enveloped in many folds of a silk handkerchief, was on the back of Belisarius. Tom Parrott was down at the mile-post to start them, while Norman took up his favourite position half-way up the ascent which terminated the gallop. All three boys had their orders, the best lad in the stable being put on Knight of the Whistle. At the word "Go!" one of the three-year-olds rushed to the front and made the running at a smart pace, the Knight lying second, while Belisarius was last of all. A quarter-of-a-mile from home the leader had shot his bolt, and the running was immediately taken up by the other three-year-old, the Knight still lying second and Belisarius last. As they neared the ascent the Knight assumed the command and Belisarius crept rapidly up to him. Just before reaching Norman the brown colt, pulling double, reached the Knight's quarters.

"It's a monkey to a mousetrap on the young 'un," muttered Norman Slade, with a flush of exultation in his dark eyes, when suddenly Bill Smith stopped riding, eased his horse, and left Knight of the Whistle to gallop in two or three lengths in front of him.

"By Jove, it has been too much for him!" exclaimed Slade, as he hurried across to speak to the jockey. "What's the matter, Bill? Are you faint, or sick, or what is it?"

"Hush; nothing is the matter," replied Bill Smith, as he bent over his saddle-bow. "He's a flyer. I could have won the length of a street if I had gone on, but it would have been a sin to show him up."

This concluded the work for the morning. Belisarius was handed over to his boy, and Slade and his host, getting into the trap which had brought them up, made the best of their way home to breakfast. A very merry meal was that. The two men were very jubilant over the event of the morning.

“You are quite right, Mr. Slade; that colt is a good deal beyond the common. The horse would have a chance for any one of the big races that could beat the Knight at a stone. I could not only have beaten him this morning but had a lot in hand besides.”

We know enough about Belisarius now,” rejoined Slade, “at all events, to ensure your not parting with him with the other two for five hundred pounds. Now, nobody suspects you of owning a good horse at present. So you can back him to win you a good stake for a very trifling outlay. You stick to the colt and leave the commission to be worked by Radcliffe and myself. The horse is very forward, so I suppose you’ll run him for the Two Thousand?”

“Certainly, if all goes well,” rejoined the jockey. “It’s a big stake, and the opposition don’t threaten to be strong. It’s never any use keeping a good horse in the stable when he is fit to run.”

The next day was passed in much talk of

bygone racing-lore. Bill Smith was highly elated at discovering that amongst what he had deemed his worthless string there was probably one very high-class racer. Money was scarce with him at the present moment, but it may be doubted whether five thousand would have induced him to part with the horse just now ; and both he and Slade knew well that there were many men in England who would gladly have given that sum for Belisarius on hearing the result of that morning's gallop. Everything was arranged between the jockey and his guest during that last evening.

Bill Smith had settled how much he could afford to trust his horse with for the Two Thousand Guineas, and either Slade or Radcliffe was to do that commission for him on the former's return to town.

To those three the secret of Belisarius's prowess was as yet, if possible, to be confined. On the Monday Bill Smith drove his guest to the nearest station, and Slade,

to use his own expression, returned to town with the winner of the Derby in his pocket.

There was not a little curiosity at Tattersall's the succeeding Monday when Sir Ronald Radcliffe lounged in a little before five, and asked, in his languid way, what they were betting on the Two Thousand.

"Three to one on the field," exclaimed one of the leading speculators. "What do you want to do, Sir Ronald—do you want it to money?"

"Thank you, Cookson," was the reply. "I don't want to back the favourite. What is Chelmsford's price?"

"Six to one," rejoined the bookmaker promptly. "What shall I put it down to?"

"You needn't put it down at all," rejoined Sir Ronald, carelessly. "Who'll make me a bid against one not mentioned in the betting?"

"What is it, Sir Ronald?" inquired two or three bookmakers eagerly.

"Belisarius," replied the baronet.

"Beli, what?" cried Cookson. "How do you spell it?"

"There's the name," rejoined the baron t, as he showed a page in his betting-book, upon which Belisarius was clearly written. "What will any one lay me to a hundred?"

"Never heard the name before," rejoined Cookson, sharply. "And it's not a very good betting-race, but if you like to have three thousand to a hundred, Sir Ronald, you can put it down."

"All right!" replied the baronet. "Does any one want to do it again?"

There was some little sparring, but eventually the same odds were laid to the same amount twice more. Then one of the speculators produced a "turf guide" from his pocket, and exclaimed "Why, it's a dark colt of old Bill Smith's. Here's twenty to one, Belisarius, to a hundred. Who will have it?"

Sir Ronald simply shook his head, and, saying "that he had got quite sufficient,"

sauntered out of the subscription-room in his usual indolent manner.

The sudden appearance of Belisarius in the betting was much talked of for a day or two in racing-circles; and all sorts of wild rumours were current concerning old Bill Smith's dark three-year-old. But as no authentic information regarding him came to hand, and, in spite of the liberal offers of the bookmakers, nobody seemed to have the slightest inclination to back him, Belisarius faded once more out of the betting. And it was only now and again at intervals that here and there a very crafty speculator dribbled a little bit on him at long shots, on the sole grounds as he explained that Sir Ronald Radcliffe wasn't a fool, and that there might be something in this dark colt after all. Still, at the rare intervals that the name of Belisarius cropped up in the betting, it was always at very long odds. As for Sir Ronald, he was a reticent man concerning his turf transactions; and with a few inti-

mates, who felt entitled to question him on the subject, he simply replied "that he had never seen the colt in his life, but that he believed those connected with him considered that he had a good chance for the Two Thousand."

In the meantime Belisarius strides away over the Yorkshire wold in grand style; and old Bill Smith, who has entirely shaken off his gout, grows "sweeter" day by day.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GAZETTE.

“——th Hussars. Charles Devereux, gent., to be Cornet, versus Langley, promoted. October 14th.” I wonder if there is any man who has once worn Her Majesty’s uniform who cannot recall the exultation with which he once read a similar notice in the Gazette. It is, in all probability, the first time he has ever seen his name in print; and, lightly though he may affect to take it, he still, whenever he can possess himself of the paper, reads that announcement furtively for the next day or two. If he does not carry his head a trifle higher, and feel inclined to put on some slight amount of

swagger amongst his youthful acquaintance, then most assuredly he is not of the clay of which soldiers should be kneaded. Most of us, I should think, could remember the fever-heat of those few days after our first appearance in the Gazette; how anxiously we made ourselves acquainted with all the braveries of *our* regiment; and, for the matter of that, dedicated much time to the costumes of the British army generally. What special designation our corps might be known by in the slang of the service was also the subject of much delight and congratulation. Whether we were the Slashers, the Springers, the Red Lancers, or the Dirty Half-hundred, whether Black Watch or Cameron Highlanders, was a distinction which it was maddening that our civilian friends (we had begun to call them so by this time) failed to comprehend the importance of. Then came all the fun of the outfit. The trying-on of our uniforms (that first experience of the pomp and circumstance of glorious war);

and, though we have a dim recollection of getting our sword between our legs, of feeling exquisitely uncomfortable in the unaccustomed dress generally, and of a tendency to snigger, on the part of the tailor's young man, at the awkwardness we displayed in our new cloth and broideries, still, upon the whole, it was a joyous time, with life and the career of our choice all opening before us.

Charlie Devereux was delighted with the official letter that confirmed his appearance in the Gazette, and further informed him that he was granted leave of absence until the 31st of December, on which day he was requested to report himself to the officer commanding the —th Hussars, at York. Old Tom Devereux had been much pleased with his son's appointment. He authorised him to draw for a very liberal sum on account of his outfit, and further promised to make him a present of Polestar for first charger, as soon as that gallant animal had fulfilled

his engagement in the autumn steeplechase at Lincoln. About this latter there was considerable excitement at North Leach. The young one had no doubt come on a good deal during the year, and was a very much better horse than he had been in the spring. Charlie was once more to ride, and was sanguine about turning the tables on his successful antagonist of last March.

“I rode very green then,” he cried, “and allowed myself to be gammoned out of the race. Whether I could have quite won I don’t know, but I ought to have been much nearer I am sure. I was looking after George Fletcher when all the time it was Jim I ought to have been sticking to.”

“Given the same animals and you ought to have the best of them this time,” said John Devereux, “but there’s no knowing what those Fletchers will run; and, remember, they are as full of dodges as an old dog-fox. Next time, Master Charlie, ride your

own race, trust your own judgment, and don't hang upon them."

To fight the spring battle of the Carholme over again would be to weary the reader. Suffice it to say that Polestar fully justified the improvement claimed for him by his friends, and that Charlie, when they turned into the straight, having satisfactorily disposed of Jim Fletcher, felt like sailing in an easy winner, but half way up the distance George Fletcher, who seemed to Charlie to have dropped from the clouds, as he had seen nothing of him after the first half-mile, challenged, and a desperate race home ensued between the pair, but Charlie this time had ridden his horse carefully, and Polestar had a good bit left in him to finish with. Holding George Fletcher's riding in great respect, Charlie determined to let him get no nearer than he could help; he was a length to the good when the final struggle began, and in spite of all George Fletcher's

efforts he could never quite get up, and Charlie was returned the winner by a good neck, to the great glory and jubilation of North Leach.

New Year's Day saw Charlie Devereux installed in his new quarters in the barracks at York, his baggage had been sent on in advance, and Bertie Slade had duly seen to the fitting-up of the two rooms destined to become his domicile for the present. He was in high spirits, disposed to like everything, and to make light of such disagreeables as are the inevitable portion of a soldier's novitiate. Recruit drill and the riding-school are necessities, but he must be a very enthusiastic soldier who can describe them as pleasures. He had been a little dashed by the confidences of a brother cornet who was still undergoing the discipline of the school.

"I shan't mind the riding-school," remarked Charlie confidently; "I've been more or less on the top of a horse from my

childhood, and was good enough to just win a steeplechase this autumn."

"So much the worse for you," rejoined his new chum. "Our riding-master will tell you that it's the fellows who think they can ride give all the trouble. Same way dismounted drill; the sergeant always says it's the gentlemen who thought they learnt it at their private tutor's that there's no getting it into. I thought that it would be a good thing to learn as much as I could before joining, and now my persecutor says, 'You see, Mr. Sparshot, there's so much to knock out of you before we can put anything into you.'"

"Well," replied Charlie, laughing, "I'm ignorant of everything, except having learnt to ride, well, we'll say, in my own fashion."

Charlie Devereux commenced his military career about three months before Norman Slade made that remarkable discovery on Bellaton Moor, but neither Bertie Slade nor

himself were even aware of Norman's presence in Yorkshire.

Amongst many other people who had seen Charlie's name in the Gazette were the Kynastons. They were both of course aware that it was impending, and they both regarded it as a point to be utilised in their respective games of life. The major had again taken on "the Firs" as a hunting-box; it suited him in some respects: first and foremost, he got the place cheap. It was not every one who cared to take a hunting-box in North Lincolnshire, where neighbours ran scarce, and there was little but the sheer sport to rely upon for amusement. Dick Kynaston was undoubtedly very fond of hunting in his own way; he took his pleasure leisurely in this respect now, but he gave the idea of a man who had been able to "ride a bit" in his youth. He was a constant attendant at the cover-side, and, though he always laughingly said his riding

days were over, yet now and again when fortune favoured him, and the country was not too stiff, he could hold his own with the best in a fast thing. As for Mrs. Kynaston, as before said, she rode in somewhat similar fashion, taking the *rôle* of a mere spectator for the most part, but some two or three times in the season showing that when she chose the best lady in the hunt would have to do all she knew to beat Kate Kynaston.

In these country quarters the major always looked forward to doing a bit of horse-dealing, and though, whether in the wolds of Lincolnshire or those of Yorkshire, experience had shown him how difficult it is to get the better of the natives in the matter of horseflesh, the major was still keen as ever about picking up bargains in that way; then again there were always Tally Ho Stakes and Gone Away Plates to be compassed, and it afforded the major infinite amusement if no profit, as witness his dis-

appointment at Lincoln Spring Meeting, to pick up a horse that he fancied capable of carrying off such races.

In spite of his resolutions in the early part of the year he had supported Charlie once more in the Autumn Hunt Steeple Chase and won a very nice little stake upon Polestar. Young Devereux in a hussar regiment quartered at York he considered would be decidedly worth cultivating. His far-seeing eye looked forward to a very pleasant billet for the York Races in the ensuing August. There was sure to be plenty of card-playing and billiards, besides the opportunities offered by the Knavesmire, and it was on these varied opportunities that the major depended upon in great part for a living.

The Firs also suited Mrs. Kynaston for this winter; not only did it allow her to retain Charlie Devereux within her thrall, for whose devotion she honestly cared but little, but it also offered the best possible chance she knew of seeing something of

Gilbert Slade, and in Gilbert Slade, between pique and caprice, Mrs. Kynaston was much interested.

It had been a mere whim in the first instance, but the indifference Slade had showed to her charms, and, latterly, his evident preference for Lettice herself, had aroused a very tornado in this wayward woman's breast. She had dwelt upon it, brooded upon it, what you will; but ended by conceiving herself passionately in love with the goodlooking hussar. Bertie Slade had run down for the day to Lincoln, to see Charlie ride Polestar, but he had so far put in no appearance at North Leach; and, now that Charlie had joined the regiment, it was not very likely that he would do so. Mrs. Kynaston had quite enough knowledge of things military to know that it was not very likely young Devereux would get leave for the first few months, until he had passed his novitiate in fact; and it was hardly likely that Bertie would

come to North Leach, unless he accompanied his friend.

Gilbert Slade, indeed, when young Deve-reux suggested a run home to North Leach for a few days' hunting, laughed as he replied, "I can tell you what the chief's reply will be before you ask him. He will tell you, 'the York and Ainsty are quite good enough for you to hunt with for the present; and it will be time enough for you to go further a-field when you are through the school, and have learned your drill.' No, no, the chief is a rare good sort for leave, but, as for your wanting it just after you have joined, he will regard that as unmitigated cheek."

Charlie accepted his comrade's dictum; in reality, he had no great desire to go back to North Leach. As far as hunting went, the sport around York would satisfy any man not wedded to the shires, and the new life was full of pleasure and amusement to a young fellow like himself. But then there

were Mrs. Kynaston's instructions, that he was to be sure and come back, bring Mr. Slade with him, and have a week in his own country, if he could compass it. And Lettice, too, as she bade him good-bye, had said, "It would be awfully jolly, Charlie, if you and Mr. Slade could run down and have a good gallop or two with us before the season closes." Well, he had done his best; and, as it couldn't be managed, there was no help for it.

During the latter part of her stay in London, Mrs. Kynaston had seen a good deal of Ralph Furzedon. It had been in the first instance because her husband had wished her to do so. Their intimacy had increased because Furzedon eagerly cultivated her acquaintance; and, latterly, because she had seen her way into making use of him. To say that she had easily detected Furzedon's besetting ambition would hardly describe the case. The man had made a confidant of her from the first; she knew how anxious

he was to push himself into society—the higher the better; but, at all events, into society of some sort, to start with. She had done him more than one good turn in that respect, and Furzedon clung tenaciously to her skirts in consequence. Mrs. Kynaston had of late made up her mind that he should marry Letty Devereux. Furzedon had thought Letty a very pretty girl to start with; but it had never entered into his mind to make her his wife until Mrs. Kynaston not only planted the idea there, but tendered it and ministered to it as a delicate flower requiring careful cultivation. She was always chanting Lettie's praises.

"That girl," she would say, "only requires to be seen to have half London at her feet. She is thrown away amongst that dowdy set of Mrs. Connop's; and she is so dreadfully loyal to her aunt that I can't induce her to come about a little under my chaperonage."

"I should have thought," Fursdon had

rejoined, "that her family was hardly good enough to give her much chance in the matrimonial market."

"No chance!" replied Mrs. Kynaston, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Much you know about it. The bluest blood in the peerage in these democratic days mates either with beauty or money-bags, if it doesn't do worse than go to the *coulisses* for its countess. If Lettie Devereux only marries a man with a tolerably good fortune she will speedily be in what society she likes in London."

Now all this, if not strictly true, was so in great part. Lettie Devereux was a very pretty girl, quite likely to make a good match, and whose antecedents were little likely to stand in her way should a man fall in love with her. Day by day all this sank deeper and deeper into Mr. Furzedon's mind. Mrs. Kynaston was far too clever ever to suggest that Lettie would suit him, she spoke of the girl always in the abstract, as one

whom nature had so richly endowed that she must have a brilliant future before her, always accompanied by regret that that future was being muddled away by the bad start she had at Mrs. Connop's. Mrs. Kynaston dilated upon Lettie's charms in a manner that her own estimate of them hardly warranted. Lettice Devereux was undoubtedly a pretty girl, but she was not such a striking beauty as it suited her friend to make out. Anyway, the idea that it would be a good thing for him to marry Lettice Devereux was beginning to take a strong hold on Furzedon's mind. He was a considerably wealthier man than people had any idea of. Not only had his father left him very well off, but recently an uncle had died who had bequeathed to him a considerable business of the same nature as the late lamented Furzedon's. He had turned up his nose at his father's calling, but that was when he was young and foolish. A shrewd, grasping, hard man, devoted to money-

making, he had determined to carry on this latter, under an assumed name of course, but then most usury is conducted on such principles, and the person with whom a loan is contracted is apt to be a mere man of straw acting for a principal in the background.

Now one of the first negotiations that had fallen to Fursdon's lot after taking up his uncle's business had tickled that gentleman immensely. It may be remembered that Charlie Devereux to meet his losses at Newmarket had been obliged to borrow money from Ralph Furzedon; he had given his acceptance in acknowledgment to three bills of various amounts, but the total of which came to a considerable sum. Worried about this, Charlie, it may be borne in mind, had confided his troubles to Major Kynaston, and that gentleman had promptly found him the money with which to redeem those bills from Furzedon, but to do this the Major had simply raised the money from a profes-

sional usurer. His knowledge of the money-lenders in the metropolis was extensive, and amongst others he had been in the habit of doing business with Ralph Furzedon's uncle, who traded, as before said, under an assumed name. It is easy to conceive how Mr. Furzedon chuckled upon discovering that the acceptances that were redeemed had only been rescued for acceptances of the same description bearing usurious interest, instead of the modest five per cent. with which as a friend he had contented himself. In short, poor Charlie's bills had simply been transferred from one pocket to the other. Major Kynaston was in profound ignorance of this; he was aware of the death of the principal, but was informed when he called that the business was carried on as usual, and, having effected the transaction, had troubled himself no more.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO THOUSAND.

THE race for the Two Thousand draws near, and, though the betting thereon is languid in proportion to what it usually was in those grand old gambling days, still this could not be so much ascribed to the apathy of the sporting public as to the narrow circumscription of the betting. The race was regarded by those conversant in turf matters as a certainty for Glendower. Such a gift, indeed, did it look to him, that it was rumoured there would be hardly any opposition, and out of the half-dozen possible runners quoted no one imagined that any of the number had much chance of defeating

the favourite, whose two-year-old career had consisted of six or seven unbroken victories. Glendower, like the upas-tree, overshadowed and killed the market. In the teeth of his triumphant career it seemed sheer madness to back any of his opponents. But when there suddenly dawned upon the horizon a dim star like Belisarius, and when men having been given time to collect such facts about him as that he belonged to Bill Smith, the famous north-country jockey, and that he had been backed by one so intimately associated with Bill Smith's former triumphs as Sir Ronald Radcliffe, it was gradually whispered about that the Newmarket crack Glendower might meet his master in the dark colt from the "north countree."

It was not that Bill Smith and his friends had laid out much money on Belisarius, indeed they were in no position to do so—some eight hundred pounds at long odds had been the sum-total of their collective outlay ;

true they had also secured various long shots about the colt for the Derby; but none of them were in a position to risk much money on a race of any kind, let them fancy it ever so dearly. Sir Ronald, as bold a plunger as ever was seen, had from such reckless speculation so crippled his resources that a monkey was the utmost left to him to venture. Much less contented Bill Smith and Norman Slade; and therefore it was sheerly the money of the people and a few astute turfites that forced Belisarius into a prominent place in the betting.

If there is one thing the speculative public are specially fond of in connection with a horse-race it is a dark colt in the hands of a well-known man at long odds. And this was just the very year to foment such a fancy. It was all very well to say Glendower must win, but to back Glendower meant the taking of a very short price about that noble animal's chance. Amongst the others it was impossible to

make out with any due regard to their previous performances that any of them could have the slightest chance of beating the favourite. There is no telling how good a horse may be that has never run; it is equally true that the converse of the proposition holds good.

“Bill Smith is a clever man,” argued the public, “and is a great horseman still, if he chooses to take care of himself; it is quite evident that he fancies this colt of his, and there is no better judge than he; surely he will keep steady to ride his own horse, and if he only does that old Bill’s good enough to tackle the very best of ’em yet.” And thus reasoning the ever-sanguine army of backers began, with that heroic constancy that ever characterises them, to stake their money freely on Belisarius. In vain did bookmakers ask each other what this might mean. The cry had gone forth that Belisarius “was good goods for The Guineas.” And those who went down to the lists and

staked, and their number was numerous as those who go down to the sea in ships, with one accord invested their money on the dark colt of the North. And thus it came to pass, that as the race drew nigh Belisarius was installed a strong second favourite. It was rumoured indeed that, though quoted at two or three points longer odds in the betting, he for all that carried more money than the hitherto unbeaten Glendower.

Norman Slade and his brother conspirator, Sir Ronald, were in as high a state of excitement as it was possible for two veteran turfites to arrive at. Every two or three days brought Norman Slade a mysterious telegram from Bellaton Moor, couched in agricultural language that must have somewhat mystified the clerks engaged in the transmission of the message. Such intelligence as "Sheep doing well," "Mutton still commands a good price," &c. &c., seemed hardly worth flashing through the wires, but all such messages conveyed to

Slade the assurance that Belisarius was progressing favourably and was in the best of health. There are two more of our acquaintance who are also much interested in the coming result of the Two Thousand, and these are Bertie Slade and young Devereux. Norman, as was his custom, had written to his favourite nephew some three or four weeks back, and informed him that if he would like to have a bet upon The Guineas he could stand a tenner in his, Norman's, book. Now it so happened that when he received this letter Charlie Devereux was sitting in his quarters, and had just been unbosoming himself of his troubles with regard to those bills. The Major's friendly assistance had of course proved only temporary; the question had, as it inevitably must, reopened itself once more, with the unpleasant addition that, like the snowball, these bills had gathered in bulk as time rolled on. Charlie had taken very much to Slade almost from the very first; to begin

with, he might have been said to almost owe his commission to Gilbert; then, again, he had all the admiration that a facile disposition always has for a hard reticent character so exactly its antithesis. The trouble of these bills weighed heavy on the young man as it is wont to do with young men who are so free with their autograph in the dawn of pecuniary difficulties. He had just made a clean breast of it to Gilbert.

“ I can’t go to the governor about it. You see, he has just had to shell out an awful lot of money for the outfit, horses, &c., to say nothing of his having had to pay up a good bit for me when I left Cambridge.”

“ Well, you see, Master Charlie, this is rather a stiff order; to get you out of your scrape requires a thousand pounds, and I tell you honestly, unless your father will assist you, I don’t see to whom you can apply. Very few of us are blest with a relation whom we can ask to help us over such a shocking tall style as this. Let me

think," and for a few minutes Gilbert Slade stared into the fire, and seemed wrapped in thought.

To do Charlie justice, no idea of seeking any other aid than advice had ever crossed his brain when he confided his troubles to his new friend. As for Gilbert, if only half-a-dozen years older in age, he was many years older in knowledge of the world than his comrade. "A deuced bad start," he thought, "for a young one to join hampered in this way; of course he must come to his governor in the end, but, as he says, it is rather an inopportune moment to bring his necessities before him just now."

"Now, Devereux," he said, at last, "I've thought it all over, and I'll tell you what you must do. It is clear as noonday that your father will have to pay those bills sooner or later. You ought to have made a clean breast of it when you were gazetted, and told him then and there, that, unless he was prepared to pay that sum for you, your

joining the regiment was an impossibility. No use talking any more about that, you didn't do it. The question is, what you had better do now. First of all, you must write to Kynaston, and ask him on what terms he can make arrangements for carrying over those bills for another six months; secondly, I can put you in the way of a chance of winning as much money as might suffice for that purpose. It won't pay them, but it will possibly obviate the necessity of going to the home authorities for another six months."

"That would be a great point," replied Charlie, ever willing to postpone the unpleasant explanation if possible, and at the same time keen to learn what it was his friend was about to recommend, for he already conjectured that the opportunity of winning money Gilbert spoke of was in some way connected with the turf.

"I've just heard from my uncle Norman," replied the other, "and he has offered

to let me stand in ten pounds with him about a horse he has backed for The Guineas. Now, if you like, this time I'll ask him to let me have a pony, and we will go halves in it. It won't make much difference to you if you do lose those few pounds."

"What's the horse?" exclaimed Charlie. Gilbert Slade laughed as he replied, "When my Uncle Gilbert distributes his benefits he takes very good care there shall be no idle babbling. I can't tell you, because I don't know. He makes me that offer, and all he says is, 'The horse will run well, and stands at very much longer odds at present than he has any business to do.' Those who know Norman Slade will tell you that's a good deal for him to say, and I put much more faith in it than I should in the most glowing account from any one else."

"It's very good of you, and I'm only too glad of the chance. I hope we shall have the excitement of knowing what the horse is before the race is run."

“Never fear,” replied Bertie; “there’s no more business-like man than my uncle. Two or three days before the race I shall get a line containing the exact note of the bet; but Uncle Norman is always mute as the grave about stable secrets till it is too late for their disclosure to be of any consequence.”

It is the morning of the Two Thousand, and the furore for Belisarius had somewhat cooled down. The horse had arrived at Newmarket all right a couple of days previous, and had duly galloped and been looked over on the Heath. But he failed to please the *cognoscenti*. Newmarket, ever prejudiced against a horse not trained in their midst, picked all sorts of holes in Belisarius. His action was lumbering; he was coachy; he looked like a non-stayer; he would tire to nothing in the last two hundred yards. Such were the verdicts of the horse-watchers, and also of others who ought to have been better judges of the northern colt’s powers.

"Well," said Sir Ronald, with just the faintest shade of anxiety perceptible in his tone, as stepping from the "special" he was met on the platform by Norman Slade, "how's the colt? They've been rather knocking him about in the London market the last twenty-four hours."

"Fit to run for his life," rejoined Slade; "and, what's equally to the point, old Bill is very fit too. He is keeping himself wonderfully quiet, sticking to his horse; and is not to be drawn into sitting up and conviviality. He is in real earnest this time; but, if it comes off, I'm sadly afraid he will make up for his present self-restraint. If he wins on Belisarius to-day I'm afraid he'll make a royal night of it."

"They don't think much of Belisarius here, I suppose?" said Sir Ronald, as they got into the fly which was to convey them to Norman Slade's lodgings, so that the baronet might get something to eat before starting for the course.

“No,” replied Slade; “Newmarket never believed in a north-country horse till it has well beaten all they have got to bring against it.”

On the Heath, from the very beginning of the racing, it was matter of universal comment what a dull affair the great race of the meeting was likely to prove. It was now known that the field had dwindled down to half-a-dozen runners; and, though all of these were backed in some fashion, still it was only Glendower and Belisarius who were backed in anything like earnest. As a well-known member of the Jockey Club observed, “If it hadn’t been for the advent of this dark colt from the North the Two Thousand would have been for all practical purposes a walk-over.” Belisarius, although he might not find favour with the Newmarket people and the majority of racing-men, yet had lost none of his attraction for the public. The dark horse who had never yet been seen on a racecourse,

and against whom five and six to one could be obtained, had a fascination for them that outbalanced all Glendower's victories, and they steadily supported their champion in defiance of the sums that went down upon the favourite at a price that had gradually shortened to seven to four. However, the saddling-bell has rung, the competitors are paraded in the Birdcage, and in a few minutes more make their way down to the starting-post. For a moment Bill Smith checks his horse and bends over his shoulder as he passes Norman on his way out.

"It's all right, Mr. Slade," he murmurs. "I shall just come straight away from the "dip"; and strangle them."

Norman simply nodded in reply, and then went off with Sir Ronald to witness the race.

The tale of that Two Thousand is soon told. The handful of horses were easily despatched by the starter, and run at a muddling pace for a good half the distance.

Descending the hill Glendower assumed the lead and improved the pace. At the Bushes he came right away from his field, with the exception of Belisarius, who was going strong a bare two lengths in rear on the whip-hand. As they breasted the ascent the north-country colt ran up to his antagonist and challenged, and for the next hundred yards it was a ding-dong struggle between them. Then Belisarius got the best of it, and, wearing down his antagonist, Bill Smith came right away in the last fifty yards and won easily by a couple of lengths.

A great cheer rent the air as the numbers went up; but in the Jockey Club stand, and amongst the gentlemen generally, there was a portentous silence. Neither was there much exultation shown by the bookmakers; it was the general public that had won the money, and it was the lungs of the general public that boisterously proclaimed their satisfaction at the result of the race.

"A great *coup*," said Slade; "but nothing to what we shall bring off at Epsom."

"It is a *coup*," replied the baronet; "and we ought to have a good chance of winning the Derby, and our double-event money as well. Belisarius appears to me as sound a colt as ever I looked over."

"Yes," rejoined Slade, "he is sound enough wind and limb. I'm not afraid of the horse, it's the man. Belisarius will stand the training all right. I wish I felt as certain about Bill Smith."

"I should think he might be trusted to keep steady now till after the Derby," replied the baronet.

"I don't know," replied Norman Slade; "you see he was short of money and shaky of reputation; and the bringing off of this Two Thousand meant a good deal to him. Men like Bill don't thrive upon success."

CHAPTER V.

"YOU SHALL NEVER MARRY HIM."

GREAT was Charlie Devereux's exultation when the telegram reached York containing the news of Belisarius's victory. A formal line had been received by Bertie from his uncle a couple of days before, in which he notified the fact that Bertie had an excessively nice bet of six hundred to twenty-five against Belisarius for The Guineas, and now this comfortable stake was satisfactorily landed. As for young Devereux, with the sanguine nature of youth, he at once saw himself clear of all his financial difficulties.

“It’s all your doing, old fellow,” he cried, as he clasped Bertie’s hand warmly. “I’m awfully grateful; it was a great inspiration of mine to come and bore you with all my troubles.”

“Never mind about that, but just bear in mind, Master Charlie, you’re a long way off being out of the wood at present. You’ve won three hundred pounds, but you don’t suppose the holder of those bills will let you renew without a bonus, do you? You are in the hands of the money-lenders now. I’m happy to say I’ve never been driven to seek their services myself; but I’ve had something to do with them on behalf of a great pal of mine, and am tolerably well versed in the ways of those gentlemen. The holder of those bills, in the first place, will make you pay pretty smartly for their renewal. I should guess about a hundred pounds. How are you going to pay off a thousand pounds with the remaining two hundred?”

“Don’t you see?” replied Charlie, with a

look of preternatural sagacity. "Of course I immediately put that two hundred on Belisarius for the Derby—he's at three to one now—providing your uncle fancies his chance. Well, if that comes off, I shall have got eight hundred together towards clearing myself."

"Good!" replied Bertie; "how about the remainder? Remember, there'll be another six months' interest on, which, at the price you're paying, will have added a hundred and fifty to the original debt."

"I forgot that," replied young Devereux, as his countenance fell somewhat; "I suppose there'll be nothing for it, then, but to make a clean breast of it to the governor."

"That's right," said Slade; "you do that. Wait till after the Derby; and then, win or lose, let them know the worst at home. It's better, anyhow, that you should be let in for one month's interest rather than six."

And so it was agreed between them that Charlie should await the result of the great

struggle on Epsom Downs, and then confess the scrape he had got into to old Tom Devereux.

A very few days brought a letter from Major Kynaston; and Bertie's knowledge of the ways of money-lenders proved only too accurate. The Major wrote:

“MY DEAR DEVEREUX,

“I have made the best terms I can with Jordan and Co., but they will have their pound of flesh, you know. Robbers, rank robbers, every one of them; but pray bear in mind that when I first suggested your applying to them you were dreadfully oppressed by the weight of your obligations to Furzedon. I agreed with you, as any man in the world would, that, bad as was the necessity for seeking assistance from a professional money-lender, it was better than remaining under such an obligation to a friend. The rascals insist on having a hundred down, and in consideration of that will let the bills run on for another six months,

at fifteen per cent. for that time. This is the best I can do for you. Give me your consent, and inclose a cheque for the hundred, and you will hear no more of Jordan and Co. for six months.

“ Ever yours,

“ RICHARD KYNASTON.”

“ The scoundrels !” exclaimed Bertie, after reading this letter. “ You must stick to your resolution, Devereux ; win or lose at Epsom, mind. These vultures are charging you just forty per cent. for the accommodation.”

If Bertie Slade could have only guessed the state of the case, scoundrels would have been not half a strong enough word to have applied to the robbers into whose clutches young Devereux had fallen. In the first place, half the bonus went into Kynaston’s pocket, for having introduced Mr. Devereux to Jordan and Co. Secondly, as we already know, Jordan and Co. was no other than Ralph Furzedon. Consequently, poor Charlie

in reality was being shamelessly stripped and plundered by a couple of men whom he looked upon as intimate friends.

The following week brought a most satisfactory letter from Norman Slade, intimating that he had paid six hundred pounds into Bertie's account at Cox's, and saying, that he fancied Belisarius's chance for the Derby very much. "The Two Thousand Guineas," he went on to say, "was a good public trial; and I can only say, he beat Glendower a good deal more easily than we expected. He is as well now as one could wish him; and, should he only continue so, it will take a right good colt to beat him at Epsom." It need scarcely be said that this letter thoroughly confirmed Charlie Devereux in his resolution. He sent off the required cheque to Kynaston, and forthwith proceeded to put the remainder of his winnings on Belisarius for the Epsom race; and that done, as he said to Bertie Slade, "There is nothing now for me to do but to

sit down and wait. I feel like a man who has insured himself to the extent of his ability."

"Yes," rejoined Slade, laughing, "we can only trust that the insurance office may not prove a bogus concern. Such insurance as yours is hardly recommended by our grave and reverend signors"

"What a disagreeable beast you are, Bertie," cried young Devereux, laughing; "I don't see why you should always take such a very gloomy view of my affairs."

"Not at all," rejoined Slade, "you'll pull through all right enough; I was only laughing at the queer view you take of things. You speak as if you had done a highly virtuous action in endeavouring to extricate yourself from your difficulties by putting every shilling you can lay your hands on on this race. I doubt, for instance, if your father would quite view it in that light."

"Don't preach, Bertie; I cannot work, and to beg I am ashamed. If I only knew

how to make this money by work, you'd see I wouldn't flinch from it. This is my sole chance; and I don't see much harm in dashing down my winnings again.”

“Nor is there,” rejoined Bertie, still laughing, “only don't take quite such a high moral tone about it. Hurrah for Belisarius! I shall trust him with a pony myself, just to pay expenses; and, if all's well, in the Derby week we'll run up and see the race. A week's leave is always given to all who wish to assist in that festival.”

Mr. Furzedon, during the autumn months, had been turning over Mrs. Kynaston's advice in his own mind. He had at last come to the conclusion, considerably swayed in his judgment, be it borne in mind, by the aforesaid Mrs. Kynaston, that Lettice Devereux would make him a very suitable wife. Shrewd, quick-witted, and cynical, the man judged for himself, and pretty accurately, in that world he knew—the world of the race-course, of club, smoking-rooms, of the stage,

the demi-monde; but of that social world to which he aspired Ralph Fursdon was not only very ignorant, but credulous in the extreme of those whom he believed to have its *entrée*.

The Kynastons he thoroughly believed to possess this passport. That Dick Kynaston was what he was did not in the least surprise Furzedon; he was quite prepared for lax morality in high places. The papers unfortunately bear pretty constant evidence that the cream of society is no better than its humbler brethren on those points. What did tickle Ralph Furzedon amazingly was, that while he as a tacit partner with Kynaston was, when opportunity served, introducing young men with expectations to the Major, that worthy—all unconscious—was bringing them back to Jordan and Co., alias Ralph Furzedon, for relief of their necessities.

But in Mrs. Kynaston Mr. Furzedon believed immensely. He looked upon her as a clever woman, moving in the very best

society, and, to use his own expression, "Knowing the ropes, able to hold her own with the best; little likely to make any mistake in her judgment of things." "And," said Ralph Fursdon to himself, "this woman looks upon it that Lettice Devereux will give any man with a little money, who marries her, a great social start."

In almost any other groove of life the man would have depended upon his own judgment, but upon this point he was not only crazed but conscious of his ignorance. We have all our ambitions; and Ralph Furzedon's was to force his way into the best society. He had always admired Lettice, but had never dreamt of her as a wife till the idea had been instilled into his mind by Mrs. Kynaston. He had plenty of assurance, and perhaps rated his personal appearance as high as most people. He was a good-looking man, but there was that indefinable something which the moment he came amongst experts would be certain to arouse curiosity

as to his antecedents. Still, with all his self-confidence, though he hardly liked to admit it, he had a hazy idea that Lettice Devereux was not quite the girl to be had for the asking; that she was a young lady upon whom the revelation of his wealth might produce but little impression; and, moreover, that she was quite capable of not being properly impressed with all the advantages—personal and otherwise—that he was prepared to lay at her feet.

Like the astute calculator he was, Mr. Furzedon at once began to reckon what trumps he held in his hand. He thought he could depend upon Mrs Kynaston to forward his interests, and he looked upon her as a very tower of strength could he but prevail upon her to espouse his cause. "Then," he thought, with an evil smile, "there are those bills of Charlie's; a cornet in a fast dragoon regiment is not likely to get much nearer liquidating them, and they grow, they grow. I wonder, by the way, how the deuce

he found that last hundred to renew with! Well, well, sisters before now have been known to wed to help a favourite brother out of a scrape; when the time comes, I trust Lettice Devereux will be too entangled to escape. I wish that fellow Slade didn't hang about her quite so much. Unlucky for me Charlie getting into the same regiment; she is likely to see more of him on that account; and it strikes me he has no idea of neglecting such opportunities as fall in his way. If he ever wants to borrow money I will make it easy for him. I'd risk a good deal to get him upon my books.”

“I suppose you have given up all hope of seeing Charlie down again this season?” said Mrs. Kynaston, one afternoon that Lettie had ridden over to call upon her.

“Yes; he declares that he cannot get away, and raves about the sport he is having with the York and Ainsty, and how splendidly Polestar carries him. Brothers are awfully selfish. No; I don't quite mean that; but

Charlie knew I had so reckoned upon his coming down and our having a few more good gallops together."

"Ah, well," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, "men are fond of change; and just at present your brother is dazzled with all the glitter of mess, and the swagger of a military life generally. Still, I do wonder he has not come home. I should have thought he would have been unable to resist the pressure put upon him."

"I'm sure I've said all I can," replied Miss Devereux.

"Ah," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, with a most provoking smile, "I was thinking of a much stronger influence than yours, my dear. If Mr. Slade had been as much in earnest as we had thought him ——"

"You have no right to say we," interrupted Lettie hotly; "I am sure I never thought ——"

"Of course not," interrupted Mrs. Kynaston in her turn, "as I thought him,

he'd have made Charlie bring him down to North Leach before now."

"There is nothing to prevent Mr. Slade coming here on his own account, if he pleases. Father gave him a general invitation to come and have a few days with the Brocklesby any time he liked this winter."

"What, when you were at Lincoln?" replied Mrs. Kynaston.

Lettie nodded.

"He can hardly be said to have shown himself keen to take advantage of the invitation."

"I suppose he waited to come with Charlie, and now he finds Charlie can't come it is getting too late."

"I don't believe in that 'can't come.' I know too much of soldiering for that. A man may not be able to get away a certain week, but don't tell me he can't get away any week in the course of the winter. Depend upon it, Mr. Slade has not been half a dozen years in the army without being

able to tell your brother how a trifle like that might be managed."

Now out of her military lore Mrs. Kynaston did know that Charlie would have most likely some difficulty in obtaining leave just at present, but she was anxious for her own purposes to make Miss Devereux believe that Gilbert Slade was not in earnest in his attentions. He had no doubt shown much devotion to Lettice during the latter part of his stay in town. Mrs. Kynaston had not been present at the Lincoln autumn races; but she had gathered that Gilbert had hardly left Lettie's side the whole day, and had heartily accepted old Tom Devereux's cordial invitation to "come and bide a bit with us, Mr. Slade, and have a look at the hunting in our country."

But many such invitations are given every year, and, though both sides are thoroughly in earnest in the contract, circumstances forbid their ever coming to pass. Mrs. Kynaston was too wise to say more, but

she had attained her object in some measure. Lettie's pride had taken fire at the thought that she was beginning to think seriously about a man who was simply indulging himself in an idle flirtation with her.

"Have you seen anything of your other admirer?" asked Mrs. Kynaston, after a rather prolonged pause.

"My other admirer?" replied Lettie; "I'm sure I don't know who you mean—I certainly can count perhaps half-a-score men who are very civil to me, and like to dance with me, but I really couldn't single out one with any apparent desire for anything more."

"How innocent we are," replied Mrs. Kynaston, laughing. "My dear Lettie, you don't require to be told that Mr. Furzedon adores the very ground you walk on."

"Nonsense," replied Miss Devereux, "he has always been civil, as an intimate friend of Charlie's naturally would be, but I'm sure he has never said a word of the kind

you suggest to me—and what's more I don't think I much like Mr. Furzedon."

"I wouldn't be in too great a hurry to make up my mind about that," said Mrs. Kynaston, "he is a good-looking man, and Dick tells me he has lots of money. I assure you many girls would think twice before they would say Ralph Fursdon nay."

"Well, it doesn't matter," rejoined Lettie. "You are quite mistaken; it is not likely I shall be called upon to decide that question; and now I must scamper home, if you will allow me to ring for my horse." A few minutes more and Miss Devereux had said "good-bye." Mrs. Kynaston stood watching her as she mounted. "Yes," she muttered, "I like you better than any girl I ever met; and I'd have been loyal to you, too, Lettie, if Gilbert Slade had not come between us; but I cannot give him up to you. You shall never marry him, if it is within my power to prevent it."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BLACK'S TIP.

THE winter presses hard upon the poorer classes generally ; work becomes scarce, and days become short, just as we seem to require more light, more food, more fire, more clothes, more of everything. Our wants expand as the means to supply them shorten ; or, sad to say, in some cases disappear altogether. The sole trade that seems to thrive in this dark time is that of the burglar, who finds the season propitious ; and, if he has the good fortune to evade the emissaries of the law, easily acquires the wherewithal to indulge in the riotous living in which his soul delighteth. Upon no class, perhaps,

does a hard winter press more heavily than the hangers-on of the turf; men who, while racing is going on, pick up a mysterious living as small bookmakers, as horse-watchers, as turf-advisers to young (can't be too young) gentlemen. I am speaking of those who are "indifferent honest." As for the scum, who are a disgrace to our racecourses, it is more than probable that they take to burglary during the winter months; having spent the summer in robbery, there would be nothing repugnant to their feelings in housebreaking during the close term.

But, to see these small betting-men, who in the summer season are so blatant, boisterous, and self-assured, habited in white hat, and the rather remarkable coats that they affect, and then to see the limp, luckless individuals, with dilapidated head covering, scanty raiment, and broken boots, who in hoarse tones, more graphically designated a "gin-and-fog voice," murmur into your ears

a hope that you can spare half-a-crown, or peradventure half-a-sovereign, to assist a broken-down sportsman. To see them, I repeat, in the wintry weather, it is hard to believe they are the same individuals. The brazen self-assurance is all out of them now; and they really are as hard put to it for a living as any class in modern Babylon. They are to be met with, for the most part, anywhere between Charing Cross and St. Paul's Cathedral; they gravitate, principally, towards the Ludgate Circus. Among these men, Sam Prance was a good typical specimen of his class; he had begun life as assistant to a pawnbroker, and that pawnbroker had been Ralph Furzedon's uncle; hence had arisen the connection between them. What had produced the undying enmity which Prance bore to the man who now stood in his dead master's shoes is about to be explained. From his boyish days Ralph Furzedon was precocious, vicious, and cunning; and even at fifteen began to

gamble on the turf. He was liberally supplied with money by his guardians, and the Jewish instinct in his veins led him even then to turn over such little capital as he possessed by speculating in the unredeemed pledges in his uncle's shop. He would often, with the assistance of Prance, invest money, say in the purchase of a ring. This would be left still exposed for sale in the shop window. In the course of two or three weeks a pound or two profit would usually be realised by the sale of it. Such profits young Furzedon, again through Prance, invested on the turf; he was shrewd, he was fortunate, and the result of his betting was decidedly profitable.

The first thing fatal to Prance in this connection was, that he too got bitten with a taste for turf speculation. Like all beginners, he was lucky at first, and this led to too great intimacy between young Ralph and himself. Furzedon became an habitual visitor at Prance's house. Mrs. Prance

was a pretty and extremely vain young woman; the compliments and attentions of her visitor turned her head; don't mistake me, and think there was anything further than the most open flirtation between them, but Furzedon's flatteries sank deep into Mrs. Prance's mind. That she was a very pretty woman, and that if she was only properly dressed she would have the world at her feet, became part of Mrs. Prance's creed. Sam was making money; it was ridiculous, he must allow her more for dress. They must live in better style, and so Prance was gradually worried into giving up the modest and comfortable tenement in which he had dwelt for the last three years in favour of a showy, comfortless, suburban villa. He vowed he couldn't afford it, but, for all that, he took it.

Mrs. Prance was not an atom in love with her boyish admirer, but for all that she was very proud of her captive; he belonged to a class superior to her own, at all events in

her eyes, and the lady had a halcyon dream of being surrounded by a knot of admirers—*gentlemen*—and not mere tradesmen, like most of her husband's friends. Well! the sequel was not long in coming. Luck turned, and Prance, who had been very far from confining his speculations to such as were deemed advisable by his young patron, got into difficulties; the usual result was the consequence. Sam Prance, if he did not actually, metaphorically “put his hand in the till”; he was detected in dishonest practices by his master, and, though old Nicholas Furzedon declined to prosecute, yet Mr. Prance was promptly turned out of his situation, and told that he need look for no recommendation from his employer to assist him in procuring another, that he might consider himself fortunate to have escaped the inside of a prison.

And now came slow and grinding misery for Sam Prance, his goods were sold, and he had to move into shabby lodgings, carrying

with him a peevish, discontented wife. With the final catastrophe Furzedon directly had nothing to do; whether his relations latterly had been as innocent with Mrs. Prance as the lady protested, her husband had jealous misgivings, but certain it was, that when after months of wrangling she finally left her home Furzedon was not the partner of her flight. From that date, Prance regarded Furzedon as the originator of all his troubles; despairing of employment, he sank into a mere jackal of the racecourse, and when times went hard with him appealed to Furzedon for assistance; this, in the first instance, had been somewhat grudgingly extended, but no sooner did that gentleman detect an obvious disposition on Prance's part to live upon him than he repelled him with the utmost scorn, he even taunted the wretched man with his bad luck, and declared that his wife had been right to leave so pitiful a creature. The idea that at first had possessed Prance's morbid mind

seethed and festered. He traced every ill that had befallen him to Furzedon's door. It was true enough that, in some fashion, it had been Ralph Furzedon's precocious devilry that had wrought his undoing, but, for all that, his own weakness and cupidity had not a little to say to it. Further applications for assistance were met with still more bitter rejoinders on Furzedon's part, until the quarrel between them finally culminated when, flushed by drink, Prance had attempted to rob Furzedon that night in the Haymarket, and been stricken to the ground. A righteous blow was that cruel left-hander, a blow such as a man is well justified in striking in defence of his property, but it filled to the brim the cup of Sam Prance's animosity, and his own prayer was that the day might come when the opportunity would be given him to settle accounts with Ralph Furzedon. He was quite aware that he held many secrets of that gentleman, and information as to his mode of life, which, though in no

way inimical to him in a legal sense, might, deftly promulgated at the proper moment, be his social ruin, and no Indian on the war-trail bided his opportunity with more vengeful vigilance than did Sam Prance.

Fortune, it so happened, was throwing the chance he longed for into his way. Major Kynaston was one of Mr. Prance's most liberal patrons. The broken man had conceived a strong liking for the major; he knew him to be no fool, though he was free-handed. He would toss his jackal a sovereign sometimes, saying good-humouredly, "Your information is not worth a cent. I've later myself concerning the horse; and know that, however well you saw it gallop last Friday morning, it will not be seen at the post; the stable can't get their money on. Never mind; you're hard up, as usual, I daresay; take that, and perhaps next time you will be able to tell me something better worth knowing."

So far, Mr. Prance was in ignorance of the

connection between the Major and Furzedon. That they were acquainted he was aware. He had seen them speak on a racecourse, but he had no idea that their acquaintance was other than of the most ordinary description. Still, it is more than likely that a clue to their association will be before long in Sam Prance's hands, though what use he will be able to make of such knowledge when he comes to it is not quite so clear.

Sam Prance had lived through the winter months he really hardly knew how, but never had he been harder put to it to keep the wolf from the door than he had this time. It was the period of the year at which there was little chance of his running across his racing patrons, men to whom he could appeal in extremity. He had the address, it is true, of some of these who employed him as a tout, and rewarded him for such information as he might send them; but a man like Prance, who had not the means requisite for leaving London, had small opportunity

of picking up intelligence, and to all other appeals his patrons had mostly turned a deaf ear. Dick Kynaston was a bright exception. Like most buccaneers, the Major, as before said, was free-handed. He had been fortunate during the autumn months, whether by cards or racing matters little; and had contrived, in his own vernacular, "to land a nice little pot." He replied to Prance's piteous cry for assistance by sending him a five-pound note, and the man felt more than ever grateful for such help in his present extremity. With the season Mr. Prance resumed his regular avocations; he was by turns tout, betting-man, and tipster. As a tout he had no information to impart; to resume the calling of a betting-man he must first acquire some small amount of capital, but to be a tipster requires nothing beyond pen, ink, and paper, and a modest amount of postage-stamps. But Mr. Prance was dead out of luck, and even his guesses at the

winners of the Lincolnshire Handicap, &c., proved unfortunate.

Men are not given to reward the giver of information which leads to the loss of their money. And, therefore, this latter industry, let him cultivate it never so sedulously, brought little grist to Mr. Prance's mill. But April had brought a change in his fortunes; he was walking gloomily up the Strand, when he suddenly ran across a bookmaker with whom he had done business in more prosperous days. The thought struck him; he stopped him, and exclaimed, "Mr. Black, give a poor devil, who is clean broke, a chance."

"Well, you do look 'dead stoney,' and that's a fact," rejoined the bookmaker. "What is it you want?"

"Give me a tip, and a trifle to back it. I can't pick a winner myself nohow."

"Well," replied Mr. Black, "there's half a sovereign for you. As for the tip, remember, I don't know much about it, but I advise

you to put it on Belisarius for the Two Thousand. You'll get something like twelve or fourteen to one; at least, they were laying hundreds to sevens an hour ago in there," and Mr. Black jerked his thumb in the direction of the Victoria Club.

How Belisarius won the Two Thousand we already know, and it is almost needless to say that Sam Prance profited a little thereby. From that out he haunted the neighbourhood of Wellington Street in the hopes of once more coming across that good-natured bookmaker. It was some days before he succeeded in doing that: though, thanks to the few sovereigns he had won over the Two Thousand, he was now more respectably attired, yet he had not the audacity to call at the club and ask for Mr. Black. When you have been half-starved and half-frozen through a long winter you do not recover your assurance all at once. Prance had been so utterly brow-beaten in his misery that he had not as yet thoroughly

recovered his nerve, and shrank from meeting a rebuff. However, his patient vigilance was at last rewarded, and he once more encountered Mr. Black. He of course stopped him to thank him for the turn he had done him, and wound up by asking him whether he fancied Belisarius for the Derby.

“No,” rejoined the bookmaker, “I don’t. I know no more now than I did last time. I am guided entirely by the money-market. On his Newmarket performance he ought to be a much hotter favourite than he is. What they are going on I don’t know, but there are certain men, who seldom make a mistake, seem to have the amount of the National Debt to lay against Belisarius. That’s all I know about it, Prance, and I should not be at all surprised to see Belisarius go back in the betting at the last. If he don’t, it will be a very warm Monday indeed for two or three of them.”

Sam Prance, as he walked away, cogitated deeply upon how he might best turn Mr.

Black's hint to his profit. He had neither capital nor credit to make much of laying against Belisarius, and certainly, after what he had heard, had no wish to back him. It occurred to him that the best thing he could do was to carry his news to Major Kynaston.

The Major would understand how to make the most of such intelligence as well as any man, and he knew from past experience that when his patron won a good stake he was liberal to any of his dependants who conduced to the result. He had recommended Kynaston to back Belisarius for The Guineas, and found it quite as profitable as backing it himself.

"The hint has proved well worth paying for, Sam," the Major had said to him upon that occasion. "I told you last summer to keep a sharp look-out as to whether they had a good two-year-old in the North. You got hold of him a little late—we ought to have been on at double the odds."

But when Mr. Prance made his appear-

ance in Mayfair, and communicated his new intelligence, Dick Kynaston exclaimed :—

“If you’re sure of what you say there is more money in this than there was in the other, but look here, Sam, there must be no mistake about it. One reason I have stood to you rather is that whatever your information might be you have always told me exactly where you got it, and I could depend upon its accuracy ; now, no nonsense, tell me the precise grounds you have for saying Belisarius won’t win the Derby.”

Prance, in reply, detailed his conversation with the bookmaker, winding up with “And, as you know, sir, the tip about Belizarius for The Guineas came from the same man.”

“Yes,” observed the Major, meditatively, “I know Black; he’s as shrewd and close an observer as there is in the Ring. I’ll just watch this little game for a few days myself, and, when I have noted who are the colt’s most persistent opponents, shall quite know

what to think of it. That'll do for the present, Sam. You're not given to running riot, and I need scarcely hint this is nothing to give tongue about."

"Never fear, Major, I'm not given to talk unless I am paid for it."

"Oh! one thing more," exclaimed Kynaston, "if you happen to hear what it is the opponents of the favourite are going on, let me know."

"Certainly, sir," replied Prance, as he picked up his hat, "if I can make out anything more you shall know it at once. For the present good-bye, Major."

As Prance walked away from the Kynastons' house, an angry flush came over his face at the sight of Mr. Furzedon leisurely lounging along on the other side of the street. Furzedon was apparently quite unconscious of his presence, and, after he had got past him some little distance, Prance turned round mechanically to glare once more at his enemy. He was not a little

surprised to see Furzedon cross the street and knock at the Kynastons' door.

"I didn't know," he muttered, "that he was thick with the Major, and, if they are not pretty intimate, how the deuce comes it that he is dropping in at this time of the morning?"

Mr. Prance was not much versed in social etiquette, but he did know that a morning call signified either business or considerable intimacy, and to ascertain what were the relations between Kynaston and Furzedon became now a problem which it behoved him to study.

CHAPTER VII.

CHARLIE'S SUMMONED TO TOWN.

THE hunting is long a thing of the past, the sap runs riotously through the trees, which are breaking forth in all the glorious verdure of the month of May. Birds are singing, buds are bursting, and grass is springing in every direction. The song of the thristle from the topmost bough re-echoes to chanticleer's shrill defiance, as the sun breaks forth in the early morning, to kiss the white-and-pink fragrant blossoms characteristic of the merry month. Few girls ever enjoyed the spring-time more than Lettice Devereux; but somehow this year the salt seemed to have lost its savour. It struck her that

North Leach was a little dull. The Kynastons had left The Firs; Charlie was away soldiering; as for John, he seemed more absorbed in the farms than usual. Lettie did not understand it: she no longer took the interest in the young horses that she used to do; how the game-fowls were doing became a matter of indifference to her; and the garden had ceased to be an attraction. She was restless and discontented; she had as yet received no invitation from Mrs. Connop, and Lettie had reckoned more upon it this year than she had ever done hitherto. Charlie, too, was so stupid; he wrote so seldom, and when he did his letters were so dreadfully egotistical, he never said anything about the people he mixed with, nor told her anything about his brother officers. Of course his letters would be so much more interesting if they contained some information regarding his associates. As for coming to North Leach, he only alluded to that as a

possibility of next winter ; and in the meantime Lettice recognised that there was a monotony and solitude about North Leach hard to bear.

She took her solitary rides, she strove honestly to busy herself with her accustomed avocations ; but, in spite of all that, there were times when she felt that the stagnation of life at North Leach was well-nigh insupportable. As for Gilbert Slade, she would trouble her mind no more about him. Mrs. Kynaston was right—if he had cared ever so little about her he would have made an effort to see her before this. But Gilbert Slade had made never a sign, and might as well have been shooting big game in India as quartered at York for all she heard of him. Mr. Furzedon, on the contrary, had twice, under some rather flimsy pretext, visited them for two or three days. Plausible though his account had been of how he had happened to be in their neighbourhood, there was a ring of untruth about

it which gave Miss Devereux the idea that Mrs. Kynaston was right, and that she herself was the attraction that drew him into North Lincolnshire. Lettice, moreover, could but see that, without venturing to proclaim himself an admirer, he paid her considerable attention, and with no undue vanity felt that he only wanted a little encouragement on her part to become a recognised pretender to her hand.

Still, Lettie had by no means got over her prejudice against him. She was courteous, pleasant to him, and did her best to make his brief visits to North Leach agreeable; but, for all that, she did not care about him herself. To say that she disliked him would be too strong a phrase, but she was certainly indifferent to him, and, bravely though she tried to master it, was conscious of an ungrounded prejudice against him. It was probably the ingrained cynicism of Furzedon's character that jarred upon Miss Devereux. He strove very hard to subdue it; he

was aware that that vein is rarely popular with women; but nature combined with habit is not easily smothered; and, in spite of all his care, his bitter views of men and things would occasionally escape his lips. Still Ralph Furzedon thought that he was making fair progress; and had he not clever Mrs. Kynaston to aid him? and did he not hold that tremendous card of Charlie's difficulties to launch whenever he thought fittest? Ralph Furzedon little thought as he left North Leach, in the very first days of May, how speedily Mrs. Kynaston would counsel an application of the screw.

But, if Charlie Devereux could find no time to go to North Leach, he could manage to get a week's leave for the purpose of running up to London. And hither he had betaken himself in obedience to the express wish of Mrs. Kynaston. She and Charlie corresponded pretty frequently—a correspondence which they did not think it necessary to mention to other people. Even at

The Firs Kate could often have given Letty Devereux later news of her brother than she herself possessed ; but Mrs. Kynaston never thought fit to mention it. She was a lady much given to philandering correspondence, and usually had two or three what she denominated "special friends" of the male sex, with whom she kept up much sentimental letter-writing. No very great harm, perhaps, in the epistles ; and yet they always contained a certain amount of love-making, such as were hardly befitting a married woman to receive. A prompt, energetic woman, as well as a capricious one, was Mrs. Kynaston, accustomed to subdue men easily. Her first feeling on discovering Gilbert Slade's insensibility to her fascinations had been astonishment, then came pique, and finally she had fanned herself into a mad passion for this dragoon, who declined to put his neck beneath her foot.

But Mrs. Kynaston was not easily beaten when she had set her mind upon a thing.

She had determined that the first thing it behoved her to put an end to was Slade's growing admiration for Lettie Devereux. Secondly, to marry that young lady to Furzedon as soon as she could compass it. Most women would have deemed these two things beyond their power to bring about, but Mrs. Kynaston had implicit reliance in her own abilities, and was wonderfully adroit in making the most of such weapons as came to her hand. Already she had put into Furzedon's head the idea that Lettie would make him an excellent wife. Already she had implanted in Miss Devereux's breast mistrust of Bertie Slade's intentions, that it was the sort of conventional flirtation these soldiers always thought proper to indulge in with any pretty girl they came across. But she wanted to do more than that, she wanted to effectually sever Lettie from her lover. It was in furtherance of these purposes that she had urged Charlie to run up to town; "she had so many things to say to him," she

wrote. "She wanted to see him now he had had a few months' military training, whether he was improved or the reverse; she hoped they hadn't spoiled his seat in the riding-school; in short, Charlie," she concluded, "I must see you; I'm sure you can get a few days' leave now, so, remember, I shall take no excuse."

However indifferently Charlie might have regarded Mrs. Kynaston's charms upon first making her acquaintance he could no longer be accused of that indifference now. He was no doubt very much in love with as thorough-going a flirt as there was in all London, and he lost no time in obeying her behest. He was in all the flush of his Two Thousand winnings, and sanguine, as young gentlemen of his age are wont to be, about being equally fortunate over the Derby. That he should present Mrs. Kynaston with a very pretty bangle as a memento of Belisarius, and tell her the whole story of how he came to back that horse, and of all that

he hoped from his success at Epsom, one need scarcely say. Mrs. Kynaston was interested in his story ; she led him on till at last she drew from him the whole story of his difficulties ; how that he had come to terrible grief in plunging at the Houghton meeting at Newmarket the year before last ; how that Furzedon in the first instance had lent him the money ; how he felt the obligation of being indebted to a friend so oppressive that he had taken counsel with Major Kynaston on the subject ; and how that the Major had borrowed the money for him elsewhere.

“ And at usurious interest, no doubt,” interposed the lady. “ Dick, I know from sad experience, is an adept at such things ; but,” she continued, with a grave shake of her head, “ my poor Charlie, you will have to pay for it. How is it all to end ? ” And then he told her how he looked forward to his winnings on the Derby to discharge all his liabilities ; and how that, when he had

wiped the slate clean, he would take very good care not to make such a fool of himself again.

Mrs. Kynaston made no further comment upon his story, but lightly changed the conversation.

“And so you have seen nothing of any of your people since you left North Leach the very end of last year?”

Charlie shook his head.

“No; foolish of me, of course. I know from your letters you have not. What I mean is have you no news to tell me from North Leach?”

“No,” replied young Devereux; “it is too early to know much about the game; too early to know much about the crops. Lettice says she finds it very dull, and is looking anxiously forward to an invitation from her aunt; but so far, I believe, it hasn’t arrived.”

“Ah! that is not exactly what I call news. Lettice did not tell you, for instance, she was going to be married—did she?”

"Lettice married! No. Who to?"

"My dear Charlie, brothers are always notoriously blind to their sisters' love affairs; but still, I should have thought you might have seen how very attentive your friend Mr. Furzedon was to Lettice last season."

"You forget," he replied, "that I was only altogether a very few days in town last year; and, to tell you the truth, I had an idea that there might be something of that sort between her and Gilbert Slade."

"Ah! You think, because at Lettie's request he assisted you to get a nomination for a commission, he was in love with your sister—a natural mistake, but I should doubt Mr. Slade being in a position to marry, even if I thought him a marrying man."

"Well, he came all the way down to Lincoln to see Polestar win last autumn, and I thought perhaps that the seeing of Lettie ——"

"Oh, yes; I know," interrupted Mrs. Kynaston, with some little acerbity; "he

sat in her pocket all day, and had hardly a word to bestow upon any one else; but that's only the way of your precious profession. Still, I don't wonder that you were a little puzzled."

"You give me credit for noticing a great deal more than I did upon that occasion. Remember, that was the day I won my first steeplechase. I had the race and Polestar on my mind the whole afternoon; and, beyond that, Gilbert shook hands with me and congratulated me on my victory. I know no more. How he and Lettie passed their time I've no idea."

"Then you don't know that Mr. Furzedon has been at North Leach twice this spring?"

"Well, I'm not sure," rejoined Charlie, "that Lettie did not say something about it in one of her letters; but it made so little impression that I had forgotten it."

"Well, I can't say positively," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston; "the two principals have

neither of them thought fit to make confession to me, but that Mr. Furzedon adores your sister I know from his own lips (a little exaggeration this); and as for Lettie, well, she knows it, and if she disapproved it how came Mr. Furzedon to go down to North Leach *twice*?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Charlie, "I never dreamt of his caring about Lettice in that way—he's not a bad fellow Furzedon, but I don't think I quite care about him as a brother-in-law."

Charlie Devereux's vision had been a little enlarged since he had joined the —th Hussars; he probably drew a more correct estimate of his fellows than when he was an undergraduate, and was conscious now that his comrades would pronounce Furzedon not quite "the right thing."

"Don't be foolish, Charlie," replied Mrs. Kynaston, "your sister is doing very well for herself. Ralph Furzedon is a very rising young man, much richer, I have some

reason to know, than he is usually supposed. A shrewd man too, not a genius—they poor things rarely get on in this life—but a clear-headed, practical man. Ralph Furzedon will push his way in this world, he will get into Parliament, and has, no doubt about it, a future before him. Lettice, like any prudent girl, knows which side her bread is buttered, and is not likely to throw on one side a good *parti* for poetical visions of love or perchance strawberry-leaves.”

“You know best,” said young Devereux, “and I suppose Lettice is doing a good thing for herself. Furzedon has always been a pal of mine, but for all that, let him be as rich as he may, I wish he were not going to marry my sister.”

“You foolish boy,” rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, “you are confusing love and settling in life; it is given to few of us to marry the man we really care for. Oh dear! how little giving in marriage there would be if *that* was an essential part of it.”

And then Kate Kynaston plunged into one of those charming little dissertations in which she was such a proficient, in which she demonstrated that it was the duty of three-fourths of womankind to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their families, and that if it was their misfortune to come across those they could have loved later on in life; they were less to be blamed than wept over. What the sacrifice had been in her own case was left most misty and undefined, but Mrs. Kynaston always contrived to send her admirers away with the idea that she was a woman wrestling with a heavy burden, that her hearer was the one man that had ever touched her heart, and that, had they met earlier, life would have been so very different.

As for Charlie, he went back to York uncomfortable about Lettice's engagement, and with a hazy idea that he had added to poor Mrs. Kynaston's troubles by his own fatal fascinations, and yet a less conceited

man than Charlie Devereux probably never trod shoe-leather.

“Well, young ’un,” exclaimed Gilbert Slade, as Charlie burst into his quarters a few minutes before the trumpet sounded for dress—“had a good time? Whom did you see, and what have you been doing? You didn’t forget to call upon my uncle Bob, did you?”

“No,” rejoined Charlie, “I called twice on him, but I didn’t see him. I was most anxious to thank him for all he had done for me; but the porter said he had not been at the Thermopolium for three or four days, and he thought that he must be out of town.”

“Pick up any news?” inquired Bertie, lazily.

“I did,” rejoined Charlie. “I saw Mrs. Kynaston, and heard a very strange bit of news from her; rather a queer thing,” continued Charlie, “to hear of your own sister going to be married from any one but her-

self, but I did. She told me that Lettice was engaged to be married."

"What!" exclaimed Gilbert Slade, springing to his feet. "Miss Devereux going to be married? Nonsense, Charlie. Who to?"

"To Ralph Furzedon, of all people in the world," replied young Devereux.

"What, that cad!" exclaimed Bertie. "Well, I'm d——d. No, I beg your pardon, Charlie, of course I don't mean that. I mean I congratulate you, old fellow. I trust Miss Devereux will be happy. Pray forgive me that slip of the tongue, and consider I've said all the proper things usual under the circumstances."

Charlie said no more, but, as he walked away to his own quarters to dress, felt less reconciled than ever to this engagement of his sister. Bertie's involuntary exclamation had strengthened his own conviction. Stripped of his fine feathers Furzedon *was a cad*. Could Mrs. Kynaston be right, and was Lettice really engaged to this man?

“Ah,” he muttered, “women are so much clearer sighted than ourselves in these matters. It is little likely that a clever woman like Kate”—and his face slightly flushed as he murmured her Christian name—“would make a mistake in such a matter.”

CHAPTER VIII.

SAM PRANCE AT HOME.

MAJOR KYNASTON had been not a little puzzled at Sam Prance's reference to young Devereux last year; he had wondered then whether Prance had the slightest idea that there were business relations between himself and Furzedon. They had now several turf transactions in common, and, moreover, Furzedon, as the young man about town, when he had the chance, invariably brought young gentlemen in difficulties to the Major for advice. He would observe with a geniality which sat ill upon him, on becoming the confidant of such troubles, "Let me in-

troduce you to Dick Kynaston, he'll pull you through. He knows all these sort of fellows, and can always tell you what to do, and who to go to." And then Mr. Furzedon would chuckle to himself at what was to him an exquisite jest, to wit, that these young innocents would shortly be brought round to his pen to be shorn; and that Kynaston was in complete ignorance that he, Furzedon, was in reality the shearer.

Kynaston had not seen Prance for some months after their interview, and had pretty well dismissed the subject from his mind; he thought it was impossible that Prance could know anything more of his connection with Furzedon than that they were to some extent turf confederates. Still, when the succeeding spring in London Prance once more made his appearance at the little house in Mayfair, the Major reverted to the subject. But he soon found that the tout knew little more than that Furzedon and himself were acquainted; that he had small knowledge of

the Devereuxs; and that his main motive was a rabid hostility and distrust of Ralph Furzedon. Prance had indeed no particular object in rescuing Charlie Devereux from Furzedon's clutches other than the hatred he bore the latter, and, although he considered his patron well able to take care of himself, yet he thought it was better to give him an insight into Furzedon's real character. Dick Kynaston had taken due note of the caution, and said to himself, "I've had to do with some queer customers in my time, but it is always a great advantage to know when you are 'sitting down to play with Ah Sin!'" This had been all Prance had intended by his warning, and he had thought no more of the matter until he saw Furzedon call at the house in Mayfair just after he had left it.

But now all Prance's curiosity was aroused. Two strong passions urged him on to discover what was the connection between the two men—his enmity to Furzedon and his gratitude to Kynaston. Blunted

and seared as all his better feelings were, he still held a dogged fidelity towards the Major. He had always been liberal to him, and the unfortunate man felt very grateful to him for the assistance he had rendered in the bitter need of last winter. Still Mr. Prance, as he sits alone in his modest apartment in Great Coram Street, does not exactly see his way to arriving at what he wants.

“What can have brought these two men together?” and as he turns this knotty point over in his mind the man puffs vigorously at his short clay pipe. Sam Prance’s domicile was by no means luxuriously furnished. A bed; a washstand; a chair, by courtesy called easy; and a table or two, comprised its contents, but it was clean, and the proprietor regarded it as princely compared to some of the lodgings he had flitted in and out of during the past few months. One of the tables was littered with a few old turf guides, a blotting-pad, pens, ink, and paper,

and at length, by way of penetrating the mystery, Prance sat himself down, and, taking up his pen, determined to, what he called, "Run off Ralph Furzedon's performances," as he would have gone through those of a racehorse with a view to getting a line through him of some other horse.

"Yes," he muttered, after scribbling fast for ten minutes or more, "it's a very nice sheet, it reads well, it's a pity his swell friends can't see it. His sire, a pawnbroker; two-year-old performances: trafficking in the sale of unredeemed pledges; backing horses on the turf; making love to his friend's wife and urging that friend to neglect an honest occupation for gambling and horse-races; pretty well that for a young 'un who had not reached his eighteenth year. Three-year-old performances: laughing at his friend when he was kicked out of his situation; mocking at him and remarking it was his own fault when his wife ran away; refusing him assistance when he was in difficulties;

giving at him; and, finally, knocking him down because, in his extremity, he asked him in pity's sake for a sovereign."

There was no doubt a basis of truth underlying Prance's summary, but the man's morbid antipathy to Furzedon must be allowed for; the colouring was more bold and vivid than the facts warranted; and that Prance should attribute every evil that had befallen him to Furzedon's malign influence must be taken very much *cum grano salis*. He had contributed a fair share himself to his own undoing; and the defalcations which had cost him his situation and blasted his character were in nowise due to any suggestion of Ralph Furzedon. However, painting his enemy in the darkest tints did not serve to elucidate the problem he had sat down to consider. That the Major was fond of a game of cards he thought was likely; that the Major preferred winning to losing he had no doubt; he never knew anybody who did not. That the Major was capable of

assisting fortune he deemed probable, and thought none the worse of him for that. In his own easy code of morality he regarded cheating and all games of chance as cleverness; and he was the best player who concealed most cards up his sleeve without detection. Horse-racing the same; he saw no harm in a robbery, provided you were in it; it was a rascally thing if you were not; and, if publicly discovered, there was always the chance of your paying the penalties, and not being paid the money. But then there it was again; clever people were not discovered, it was the bunglers that were found out. Now, whatever Furzedon had done—and remember, there was no enormity of this sort that Prance believed he had not committed—he had never been found out. Surely Major Kynaston could not have fallen into the mistake that this was a young gentleman from whom there was money to be won. No, no; the Major was far too 'cute not to have found out for himself long ago

that there was nobody about better able to take care of his money than Mr. Furzedon. What could be the link that bound the two men? Nothing but chance is likely to throw light upon one phase of their connection; but of their confederacy on the turf it will be odd if Mr. Prance is not shortly acquainted; and when that comes to pass there will be slight doubt of Sam unbosoming himself. Of such partnership he will feel certain that his patron must eventually get the worst.

“Because he is young,” muttered Mr. Prance to himself, even now in ignorance of the facts, “the Major thinks he is green. He little guesses he is dealing with the foxiest devil he ever met; who makes capital out of his youth and inexperience. The Major is wary, up to trap, no doubt; thinks, I dare say, that he is not to be had by any one alive. It’s a queer world, and it seems a farce to suppose that, sitting here in a room like this, my experience can be

good for much ; but, for all that, I've learnt this, that the biggest sharper in a skittle-alley is generally the youngest and most innocent-looking yokel. I must get to the bottom of this ; for cleaned out by such a robber as Furzedon I'm blessed if I see the Major."

Dick Kynaston was in no very great danger ; he was much too wise not to have taken a pretty accurate estimate of his new partner by this time ; he was quite aware that, young though he might be, Furzedon was already considerably more rook than pigeon ; and, whatever his original intention might have been, had thoroughly abandoned any idea of a snatch at his quill-feathers. The revelation that Furzedon was practically Jordan and Co. would certainly have surprised him, but would have made very little other difference to him, save in one respect ; it mattered little to the Major to what money-lenders he took his young friends, his profits in the transaction were pretty much the same in any case. But Dick Ky-

naston had been born, and, however shady his avocations might now be, still clung to the status of, a gentleman. He was ready to interview the money-lender in his own den, but, let him once recognise that Furzedon was numbered of the usurers, and the Major would take good care that he never crossed the threshold of Mrs. Kynaston's drawing-room again.

Although Sam Prance was not aware, as yet, that Furzedon had inherited and taken up his uncle's business, it stands to reason that his old connection with the pawnbroking business might throw that knowledge in his way at any moment. Should anything prompt him to inquire, it would, of course, be as easy as possible for him to ascertain who was really at the present moment Jordan and Co. His former apprenticeship had taught him the freemasonry of the trade; and what that means we all know, let the trade or profession be what it may.

Revenge upon Furzedon was interwoven

into Sam Prance's very being. It might slumber for a time, but it never died. He would brood, in his morbid way, over all the misery that man had cost him till he wound himself up to that state of mind in which men contemplate taking the life of their fellows. But Prance had considerable regard for his own neck, an apprehension more preservative of life than it usually gets credit for. To say that he had hardly the tigerish temperament of which murderers are composed would be absurd. Murderers seem composed of every possible fibre, from the ruffian who slays his fellow from sheer brutality down to the cringing reptile who does away with his foe simply from terror. No; Mr. Prance in his solitary musings had often muttered to himself with passionate execrations, "How I should like to kill him!" But he had never seriously contemplated anything of the kind. He would have liked to drag Furzedon down to his own level, but of that he felt there was

small prospect. His foe was wealthy, and a man likely to keep a strong hand on his gear, let it be well gotten or ill. There was little likelihood of his being able to menace Furzedon's ruin in that wise. In one way only did Mr. Prance see an opportunity of gratifying his hatred, and that was in socially exposing him. He did not quite know as yet even how that was to be brought about, but he was conscious that he knew a good many shady transactions of Furzedon's, and he had little doubt that eventually others would come to his knowledge if he only kept ceaseless watch upon his quondam friend. Not such transactions as would place Mr. Furzedon within reach of the law — Prance considered him too cunning for that; but it might be in his power to proclaim to the world things that would cause Ralph Furzedon's swell acquaintances to turn their backs upon him. And Prance had somehow divined his enemy's weakness in this respect.

It was so. A desire to rub shoulders with the *haut monde* was the aim of Ralph Furzedon's life. With this object he had gone to the University. The furtherance of this design had a good deal to say to his going on the turf. It was something to know a Lord, if it was only on a racecourse; to pass the time-of-day to a real swell, even if it was only at Tattersall's. Furzedon had tact, was pachydermatous, and, though pushing, not obtrusively so. He did not force an acquaintance, but he wriggled into one with all the sinuous twistings of an eel. Men found themselves gradually committed to a bowing recognition with Ralph Furzedon, while at the same time, they wondered how the deuce they came to know him. Instinct had told Prance how to strike his enemy; it wanted only that fortune or his own exertions should give the weapons to his hand. Furzedon too, and with some reason, flattered himself that he was making his way slowly but surely in the path he had marked out, and should Mr. Prance ever compass his

projected *exposé* he will have the satisfaction of knowing that he could have dealt his adversary no bitterer blow.

As for Ralph Furzedon he was very well contented with the way things were going with him. Most especially was he well pleased with his new allies the Kynastons. The Major promised to prove profitable to him all round. It was from him that the inspiration came concerning Belisarius for the Two Thousand, and Furzedon had won a very nice little stake over that race; then, as for Mrs. Kynaston, she looked like being of much value to him from a social point of view. She had procured him invitations in more than one direction that he coveted, and, cunning and suspicious as he was by nature, he placed unlimited reliance on Mrs. Kynaston's advice concerning this unknown country which he was now entering. It was at her instigation that he had determined to woo Lettice Devereux, and he had resolved to be guided by her advice in every stage of the matter. It must be observed

in Kate Kynaston's defence that she knew nothing of Furzedon's antecedents, and believed him to be no more than a racing confederate of her husband's. In spite of that indescribable something about him which, as before said, was apt to produce inquiry concerning his forbears — a point which none of Furzedon's acquaintance had as yet succeeded in penetrating — Mrs. Kynaston regarded him as by no means an ineligible match. He was young, tolerably good-looking—those who admire the Semitic type in man would say very—and undoubtedly well-off. If Lettie Devereux could make up her mind to fancy him she might consider herself well married. There was, of course, the possibility that she might do better; but it is safer to gather the apple within our reach than to set our affections upon those on the topmost bough.

And so Mrs. Kynaston went to work to bring about a match between those two with a clear conscience.

CHAPTER IX.

KATE KYNASTON RECONNOITRES.

“WELL, Mr. Furzedon, when am I to congratulate you?” exclaimed Mrs. Kynaston, as she welcomed that gentleman to her pretty little drawing-room. “Am I to do so to-day? Am I to congratulate you on having stormed the citadel, or to chide you for your want of enterprise in still delaying the final assault?”

“It’s all very well,” replied Furzedon; “but it is possible to speak prematurely in these cases. I don’t feel quite sure of my ground with Miss Devereux.”

“Surely you have made her understand

that you're paying your addresses to her," replied Mrs. Kynaston.

"Oh, yes; I don't think there could be any possible mistake about that, but I can't say that I get much encouragement. She is polite enough, and all that; but you know what I mean, she don't encourage me to open my heart."

"Dear me, what has that got to do with it in these days? Don't you know that the basis of matrimonial arrangements in these times is—are you able and willing to open your pockets? Don't be faint-hearted, a girl can't say you no till you have asked her the question, and, if she does, tell her you won't take that for an answer; a little dash and resolution and you will be engaged to Lettie Devereux before the season's over, and a very sweet, pretty, lady-like wife she will make you."

"I wish I quite thought so," rejoined Furzedon, "but her manner rather gives me warning to go no further than I have done."

“Never fear to put your fortune to the test,” rejoined Mrs. Kynaston gaily, “and don’t take thrice no for an answer. I have got a hint to give you: Charlie Devereux is in grievous difficulties, and trusting to his Derby book to pull him through them. It never does you know. He is sure, poor boy, to be in worse trouble than ever after the race. Now, there’s an opening for you. A few hundreds is not much object to you, if you are in earnest about this thing. Save your friend from the results of his folly—you enlist him at once on your side; and as for Lettice, she can hardly refuse to listen to her brother’s benefactor.”

“How did you learn all this?” exclaimed Furzedon, eagerly.

“From Charlie himself,” replied Kate Kynaston. “He was up in town for two or three days last week, and told me if Belisarius didn’t get him out of the scrape there was nothing for it but a full confession to his father.”

“He told you this?” said Furzedon, as his quick brain rapidly turned over the chances of the situation.

“Yes,” he continued at length, “that would give me an opportunity. I am not given to throwing my money away much, but you are quite right. I should have a *quid pro quo* in this case, and I would willingly risk a few hundreds to make Miss Devereux my wife. Is she likely to be in town soon?”

“That’s just what I can’t make out, but I mean knowing this afternoon. She is dying to come, but that tiresome old aunt of hers hasn’t written as yet; however, I’m going out to see her to-day, and if she has not sent that invitation I fancy she will after I’ve had a talk with her.”

“You won’t mention my hopes to Mrs. Connop?” said Furzedon, a little anxiously.

“Perhaps,” responded Mrs. Kynaston, with a somewhat queer expression on her face, “I shall see. I don’t think you are quite the

nephew that old woman would be disposed to welcome; she is a foolish romantic old thing, and has, I suspect, nursed the idea of marrying Lettie to Mr. Slade."

"Not quite so foolish, my dear Mrs. Kynaston, as you think," rejoined Furzedon, as he rose to take his departure; "I've a strong idea that those two were very good friends before they parted last year."

"That matters little," replied the lady, coolly; "Mr. Slade is in no position to marry, and any slight flirtation there might have been between them is not a thing worth your consideration. Good-bye, don't forget my advice; ask Lettie Devereux to be your wife the first time you have an opportunity, and, should she say no, which I don't believe she will, well, ask her again when she has had a few weeks to think about it."

Mr. Furzedon said no more but bade his hostess adieu, and walked leisurely back to his own rooms, pondering deeply on the advice that had been given him.

Interested though her motives might be, Mrs. Kynaston could hardly be accused of not working energetically to bring about the marriage she had planned. It had become essential for her purpose that Miss Devereux should now make her appearance in town, and she drove off that afternoon to call upon Mrs. Connop, and ascertain when Lettie might be expected. She found that lady at home and very full of grievances; to begin with, she was suffering from a severe cold, and that as a rule may be pronounced quite sufficient grievance without going into any others that may possibly afflict us; moreover, she had been compelled, from some cause or other, to have the workmen into the house; and what Londoner, that has had experience of him, does not know what a terrible old man of the sea is the British workman when he once gets within your gates?

“I hope,” said Mrs. Connop, “it has never been your lot to know what having

the work-people in means. The British workman has been often abused and deserves every bit of it. He breaks my rest with hideous regularity. He dawdles about all day; shows great capacity for beer; is profuse in assurances that he shall have finished the job by the end of the week. He looks at it, I suppose thinks over it, but he never works, and *he never goes.*"

"Ah! fortunately we have no experience of that sort of thing. We haven't a house of our own but always rent one, and Dick would take very good care that there was no necessity for that during our tenancy, but I've always heard that the work-people are very trying. Do you expect Lettie to visit you this year? She was rather looking forward to it, I think, the last time I saw her."

"And I am always very glad to have her with me," rejoined Mrs. Connop, "but it's impossible while the house is in such a muddle as it is now. If I had had an idea

what it was going to be I'd have slipped down to Brighton for a month, and got out of the way of it all. But they assured me it would take less than a week, and I was foolish enough to believe them. However, they vow that it really is very nearly finished now, and, forsworn as they have often proved themselves, I try to believe them this time. I shall write for Lettie as soon as ever I am rid of them. How was she looking when you saw her last?"

"Oh! she was well enough when we left The Firs, but she finds North Leach rather dull now the hunting is over. She gets a glimpse of the world with you; and, as is only natural, she longs for the fun and gaiety of London in preference to the monotony of her life in the wolds; besides, she made rather a sensation last year—she had quite a train of admirers."

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Connop, "she is pretty, and she was no doubt popular, and

got on well at all the dances I took her to. But Mr. Slade was the only pronounced admirer that I saw. He, I think, was a good deal struck with her."

"Oh! she had others besides him, and more profitable ones to boot."

"I like Mr. Slade," replied Mrs. Connop sharply.

"I think most people do," said Kate; "he is very good-looking and a most agreeable cavalier. I was only speaking from a matrimonial point of view; but, from what I hear about him, Mr. Slade is in no position to take unto him a wife at present."

"Lettie has plenty of time before her to think about that."

"No doubt," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston. "But it is a thing that naturally crosses a girl's mind as soon as she is introduced. Mr. Furzedon, I should say, was quite as much struck with Lettie as Mr. Slade, and only wanted a little encouragement to declare himself."

"I don't like him as well as the other," said Mrs. Connop, sententiously.

"Perhaps not," replied Kate Kynaston; "but, when it comes to an eligible *parti*, Mr. Furzedon is preferable. He is a man very well off, and perfectly independent."

"Ah, well! as I said before, Lettie has no cause to hurry herself as yet."

"No, indeed," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, rising. "I am so very glad to have been fortunate enough to get in. I trust your cold will soon be better, and that you will bring Lettie round to see me before many days are over. Do come, if it is only to show that you are delivered from this *incubus* that besets you. Good-bye." And as Mrs. Kynaston descended to her carriage she murmured, "Yes, my dear friend, I want these workmen out of the house quite as much as you do."

Furzedon, after duly thinking over Mrs. Kynaston's advice, and what she had told him about Charlie's difficulties, had fully

made up his mind as to the plan of his campaign. Nobody knew the story of Charlie's difficulties better than he did ; but it was news to him that young Devereux contemplated a "plunge" on Belisarius as a means of extrication from his embarrassments. He resolved he would boldly ask Lettice to marry him as soon as she appeared in London. He had a very tolerable share of self-esteem, but he hardly expected to be successful upon this occasion ; if possible, he determined to avoid positive rejection, but to withdraw his pretensions discreetly as soon as he saw it imminent : then, only let Belisarius be beaten for the Derby, and he would make another attempt. Charlie would be then deeper in the mire than ever. And he might urge upon Miss Devereux that it lay with her to make it possible for him to pay his brother-in-law's debts.

Belisarius ! He hadn't troubled his head much as yet to think about that colt's pros-

pects for the Derby, but now it dawned upon him that as far as he was concerned the success of Belisarius would be inimical to his interests. He must make inquiries; the horse was not going very well in the market; he wondered whether there was anything wrong with him, he had had no hint of such a thing himself; perhaps Dick Kynaston might have heard something about it; he must ask him. Now it so happened that his visit to Mrs. Kynaston had been made the afternoon before Prance related to the Major what Mr. Black had told him; and when Prance espied Furzedon knocking at the Kynastons' door that gentleman was calling there expressly to learn what his turf confederate thought of the favourite's chance at Epsom, and was speedily put in possession of the Major's newly-acquired information.

“Wants inquiring into a bit, you know; but that fellow Black has the eye of a gled for the market and the nose of a bloodhound

for a dead 'un. I should be very sorry to back a horse of which he held this opinion."

"Then," said Furzedon, "we had better lay against Belisarius this time, instead of backing him. It's safer as a rule, and at his present price there is a good bit of money to be made. Moreover, if Black is right, he will go back in the betting before the race, and there will be no difficulty about covering our money; besides, it jumps with my own inclinations; not that I'm such a fool as ever to be swayed by them in matters of business; but it's pleasant when they happen to run hand in hand. I've private reasons of my own for hoping Belisarius will not win."

"Would it be indiscreet," rejoined Kynaston, "to ask those reasons?"

"Very, Major," said Furzedon, laughing; "let's say I don't know how to pronounce his confounded name, dislike his colour, the cut of his tail—anything."

"That's settled then," rejoined Kynaston;

"if my inquiries are satisfactory, we decide to 'pepper the favourite,' to what extent depends upon what I hear."

"All right," replied the other, as he took his leave. "There's no hurry, I think. I shall see you again in the course of a day or two."

Ralph Furzedon had not overlooked Prance in the street, although he had taken no notice of him; but he had not seen that he came out of the Kynastons' house, nor had he the slightest idea that the Major even knew of such a person's existence.

Suspicious by nature, had he known this he would have been at once on his guard. Hewas thoroughly aware of Prance's enmity, and knew, that, though the man could do him no positive harm, yet he could tell stories concerning him which he, Furzedon, would just as soon were buried in oblivion. He regarded Prance as innocuous simply because any disclosures he chose to make could only be made to that scum of the

turf with which he habitually consorted. He was utterly unaware that in his character as tout Sam Prance was acquainted with many men like Kynaston who held a fair *status* in society.

To say that Gilbert Slade had been astonished at the news young Devereux had brought back from London would feebly express his feelings. He was thunderstruck, he had never thought of that, he barely knew Furzedon, had seen very little of him, and felt very indisposed to see more. He knew that he was intimate with the Devereuxes, had been at Cambridge with Charlie, had stayed at North Leach, and all that, but he never pictured him as a possible pretender to Lettice's hand. It might be said that he never pictured himself in that capacity, he had admired Miss Devereux very much, he thought her a very nice girl, would be delighted to meet her again, and was quite in earnest in accepting old Tom Devereux's invitation to North Leach.

It had been no fault of his that visit had not been paid. His answer to Charlie, when the latter suggested it, had been perfectly straightforward; he did not think the Colonel was likely to look favourably upon an application for leave from the new recruit at present, unless he could advance some very serious cause for requiring it. He did not quite see his way into going to North Leach by himself, and so that visit had never been paid; but now that he heard Miss Devereux was engaged to be married to somebody else he discovered that his feelings towards her were very much stronger than admiration.

It was true that he had never thought of marrying her, but then he had never thought of marrying anybody. Marriage was a thing that had taken no definite shape in his mind—a ceremony that he might or might not go through in years to come. Even if he had ever contemplated it, he knew it was a thing that would be warmly opposed by, at all

events, one of his relations. It was only the other day that his uncle Bob, when joking him about Miss Devereux, had reminded him that he would give no consent to his marriage before he got his troop; and, although he was within very measurable distance of that much-desired piece of promotion, still there was no immediate prospect of its taking place, and two or even three years might elapse before he saw himself in the Gazette. He couldn't understand it; well, he supposed money was everything now-a-days; and yet he had thought Lettice not a girl of that sort either. He was not likely ever to be a man of more than moderate means himself; and, though he would probably inherit his uncle Braddock's property eventually, yet, in the ordinary course of things, that was not likely to take place for many years. Well, if the thing was done, there was an end of it. Charlie was not likely to be misinformed on such a subject as this. However, they were both going up

to London at the end of the month to see Belisarius win ; Miss Devereux would, no doubt, be in town about that time. He would see her then, and judge for himself ; he would, at all events, discover whether it was true that she was engaged to Furzedon.

CHAPTER X.

FURZEDON PROPOSES.

“No hap so hard but cometh to an end,” as the old poet sings.

The workmen are out of the house at last; the long-looked-for invitation has been despatched, and Lettie Devereux responds to it, has made her curtsey in Onslow Gardens—little knowing how anxiously her appearance in town was looked forward to by well-nigh half-a-dozen people. Her arrival was speedily notified to Mrs. Kynaston, and through her—directly or indirectly—Furzedon, Charlie, Slade, &c., were quickly aware that Miss Devereux was once more residing under the shelter of her aunt’s wing. Ani-

mated was the conversation between Mrs. Kynaston and Furzedon when, upon receipt of the news, the latter called in to see the lady who was kind enough to manage the tangled skein of his love-affair.

“And you think I’m right, Mrs. Kynaston?” said Furzedon, at the close of the conference of some half-hour’s duration. “You would strike at once?”

“Decidedly,” rejoined the lady. “Your plan of action is admirable. Come to the point without loss of time. Back out of it if you find it going against you; say you will not venture to press for an answer as yet; that when Miss Devereux knows you better she will be perhaps better able to recognise your devotion. Pshaw! Any man out of his teens knows the whole gamut usually run up and down on these occasions. And, remember, you must not be disheartened by one rebuff. Lettice is country-bred, and the provincial mind does not expand quite so early as that of a

London young lady. Still, I think she is rapidly awakening, and already understands the insipidity of life at North Leach."

"Thanks, very much," rejoined Furzedon. "I shall do precisely what you recommend; and, acting further on what you tell me, return to the charge should Belisarius lose the Derby; pleading that the help Charlie could accept from a brother-in-law he would feel compelled to decline from a friend. Wish me good luck, Mrs. Kynaston, and I will bid you good-day."

"All success to you," replied the lady; "don't be too abrupt this time; and should it not be successful—ah, well! I shall see you before it is judicious to deliver the second assault. It may not be necessary, but, should it be so, I will advise you once more. May good fortune attend you!"

When a man's feelings are deeply interested, the asking a woman to marry him is doubtless, if not a *mauvais quart d'heure*, at least a very nervous one; but in Furzedon's

case it was not so. He admired Lettice Devereux, he liked Lettice Devereux, and Mrs. Kynaston had persuaded him that she would make him a good wife. He had made up his mind to marry her, and was very resolute to attain his end, but, as for saying he was in love with her, that was quite another thing ; he would feel no despair in case of rejection ; he would still sap steadily forward to attain his object, as he would to attain any other object that he considered essential to his success in life ; but, let him once be convinced that this thing was beyond his reach, and he was not likely to either break his heart about it or to display any great animosity to those who should thwart his purpose. At the present moment he would have sacrificed ruthlessly any one who stood in his way ; but, the game once given against him, he would trouble his head no further about his successful rival. A strong hater and vindictive man, when he took it into his head to feel aggrieved, but

feeling no resentment towards those who got the best of him on any point, the thing once over.

Proposing with the expectation of being refused is, to borrow a phrase from the hunting-field, like "riding for a fall." It requires nerve, and it is not exhilarating; but in both cases there must remain a feeling of much satisfaction when the thing is got safely done with. Furzedon by no means liked the business before him; but he had made up his mind to do this thing, and do it he would. And in this frame of mind he wended his way to Onslow Gardens as soon as he heard of Miss Devereux's arrival there. If he could make the opportunity, he would ask the question without further delay. The knotty question that puzzled him on his way there was, how he was to get Mrs. Connop out of the way; and that at last he was fain to confess was beyond him. He repented now that he had not besought his confidante's aid; Mrs. Kynas-

ton, he felt sure, could have managed that matter for him had he but asked her. Now he could only trust to the chapter of accidents. When he arrived at Onslow Gardens, he found both ladies in the drawing-room; and the thoroughly unembarrassed manner in which Lettie welcomed him would have convinced a far less shrewd man than Furzedon that, whatever her answer might be, her feelings would have very little to do with it. At all events, guided by Mrs. Kynaston's revelation and her own observation, Mrs. Connop came to the conclusion that Furzedon had no chance; "and," mused the old lady, "if he is fool enough to think so, the sooner that bit of nonsense is knocked out of his head the better." So, after a quarter-of-an-hour's desultory conversation, she rose, and, under some frivolous pretext about finishing a letter, left the room, and gave Ralph Furzedon the opportunity he desired.

He had one point in his favour, and that

was, that he was oppressed by no nervousness. He had got his chance, and determined to come to the point as quickly as possible.

"I have been most anxious to see you, Miss Devereux," he commenced.

"Very good of you to say so," replied Lettie. "You can't have been more anxious to see me than I have been to see London."

"I have got something to ask of you--a great favour to beg of you."

"Stop, Mr. Furzedon," interrupted the girl. "Remember, it is unwise to ask favours, unless you've good grounds for supposing they will be granted."

"I have very fair grounds for supposing that my request will be listened to, at all events. No man can lay claim to more. I am a great friend of your brother's; well known to all your people; well-to-do. I might go further, and say wealthy."

"It is quite unnecessary, Mr. Furzedon, to go through a catalogue of your social

advantages," replied Lettie, with just a tinge of bitterness. She made no pretext of not understanding what her companion was driving at, but was a little nettled that he so persistently ignored the hint that she had given him. "To a friend of Charlie's," she continued, "I would grant any request that I had given him reasonable grounds for supposing I would say 'Yes' to."

"It is difficult for a man to interpret that phrase. We are not as quick as you to read what are reasonable grounds. Some of your sex—and they are those best worth winning—will give a man scant encouragement until he has put such request in formal words. It is natural. A sensitive girl is afraid of committing herself before a man has spoken."

"But if a girl has not only given the man no encouragement to speak, but has done her best to warn him that he is about to ask a foolish question—what then?"

He was clever of fence and fought his up-

hill battle both doggedly and with tact. "I think," he replied, gravely, "it should deserve better than to be called a foolish question. When a man lays his life and fortune at a woman's feet he is paying her the greatest compliment that lies within his power, at all events."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Furzedon," rejoined Lettie, quickly. "I don't pretend to misunderstand you, but you must know this thing cannot be. I welcomed you as my brother's friend; I have given you no cause to suppose that I had any further feeling towards you. Let us remain friends, and forget that this conversation has ever taken place."

"I shall never forget it," he replied, brusquely; "and I refuse to take this for your final answer. I can wait, and trust to time and my devotion to plead for me; but as long as no one else has won your hand I shall ever be a pretender to it. I am answered for the present, and am not likely

to intrude the subject upon you again for some time."

"I thank you for the compliment you have paid me," replied Lettie, with some little stateliness, and rising, "but, believe me, my answer is irrevocable."

Ralph Furzedon took the hint and his hat. "You will make my adieux to Mrs. Connop," he said, with a low bow; "and you won't object to say good-bye;" and as he spoke he extended his hand. Their palms crossed for a moment, and then Ralph Furzedon descended into the street, and began to reflect on the result of the battle.

"That's the end of the first round," he muttered, "to use the language of the prize-ring. Well! I expected to get the worst of it, and I did; but I can hardly be said to have been badly beaten. No; I don't think I threw a chance away. I am now a declared pretender to her hand. A rejected one it is true. She can plead no ignorance of the state of the case for the future. Moreover,

I have had resort to no subterfuges, but the very venial one of saying that she will hear no more of my request for some time. Should Belisarius be beaten at Epsom I shall most certainly have to urge the same request again, with the additional argument that a wealthy brother-in-law would represent the good genii that would assist Master Charlie out of his scrape. I only trust that he may still further complicate matters at Epsom. I'm not given to throwing money away, but I should not grudge a good round sum if it brought me Miss Devereux's hand."

It is characteristic of the contradictions of our nature that Ralph Furzedon had never felt such admiration for Lettice as in the moment of his rejection. He was struck with her spirit, and at the same time the womanly way in which she strove to soften her refusal. He had wanted her for his wife; that was nothing. He thought she would further his ambition once placed in that position; but now, for the first time,

the feeling of love was aroused within his breast, and he resolved that he would not resign his pretension to Lettie's hand as long as, by fair means or foul, he saw the slightest chance of winning it; and Furzedon was a man likely to put a very liberal construction on the old adage, "All's fair in love or war."

Mrs. Connop waited until she heard the front door close, and then at once descended to the drawing-room. She was not a little anxious to hear the result of the interview, and, not being given to beating about the bush, went straight to the point at once.

"Well, Lettie," she exclaimed, "what did you say to him? Pooh! child, there is no need to make any mystery about it. I know very well that Mr. Furzedon came down here to-day to ask you to marry him, and I went out of the room to give him a chance of doing so"

"Surely, aunt, you don't think that I ought to have said ——"

“Ah! you’ve said ‘No’ then. I thought you would. But, as I was told he was determined to ask the question, I thought the sooner it was over the better. Quite right, my dear. I like the other one best, ever so much.”

“I don’t understand you,” rejoined Lettie, a little stiffly.

“Oh! yes, you do, and agree with me, also,” retorted Mrs. Connop, laughing. However, in the meantime, run up-stairs, and get your bonnet on; you will only have just time for a cup of tea before the carriage comes round.”

Miss Devereux thought it wisest to close the discussion. She did not want to explain that Gilbert Slade had made no sign since last November, and that, though he had certainly given her cause to suppose he cared a good deal about her, he had not quite gone the length that justified a girl in calling him her lover. It was, indeed, rather a sore subject with Miss Devereux

at present, and any coupling of her name with Gilbert Slade she was sure to resent sharply.

Up in the North, meanwhile, expectation ran high. All Yorkshire was agog to see the big race of the South once more carried off by a north-country horse. "The land of ham" was on Belisarius to a man, and at the York Club the latest bulletin concerning Bill Smith's crack was eagerly promulgated and discussed. Some of the old hands, who had witnessed Bill Smith's career from his first race as a stable-boy to the triumphs of his zenith, and also been present at the mistakes of his later days, shook their heads and said, "Yes, the horse is doing splendidly no doubt—*how about the man?* You young gentlemen who back Belisarius will do well to remember that the jockey is more difficult to bring fit to the post than the horse."

To which the partisans of Belisarius rejoined, "Nonsense, we know Bill Smith's weakness, of course, but he's not a fool. He

can take himself by the head when it is worth his while. He was all right at Newmarket, and you'll see he will be all right at Epsom."

Now, though this doubt was in the mouths of a good many people in his own country, yet the way he had ridden his horse in the Two Thousand had generally wiped out all misgivings concerning Bill Smith's sobriety in the South. It was believed that he had turned over a new leaf, and that the discovering himself to be the owner of such a flyer as Belisarius had worked a complete reformation in his character—at least for the present. This more sanguine view of the case was undoubtedly prevalent among the turf circles in the metropolis, though shrewd observers, like Mr. Black, noted that there was a small knot of speculators who seemed unremitting in their hostility to Belisarius. Clever men too, and by no means given to bet foolishly; and, now that Dick Kynaston's attention had been called to it, he was

speedily convinced of the truth of what Prance had told him. Very cautious and wary were these men, not to be beguiled into laying a longer price, but always prepared to show their disbelief in the Two Thousand winner whenever anybody offered to take half a point less than the odds. What they were going on the Major did not know, and that was a riddle he was very anxious to arrive at.

Curiously, the first hint of the danger that threatened Belisarius came to Kynaston from his wife. "I got a letter from Charlie Devereux this morning," she remarked, as the Major looked into the drawing-room for a moment, previous to marching off to lunch at his club, "and he says that some of the old racing-men at York are rather incredulous about Bill Smith's riding a Derby winner once more. They say the horse is all right, but that the man cannot be trusted to keep from drinking; rather a bore should they prove right, for, as you know, I have

backed him what for me is pretty stiffly; however, I don't suppose these old fossils know much about it. I am very sorry for Charlie," continued Mrs. Kynaston, "for as we know, Dick, when it comes to turf matters, the 'old fossils' are apt to know a good deal more than young people who are just beginning to study them. Does this jockey, Smith, drink so?"

"Yes," rejoined the Major, "I begin to understand it now. That's why those fellows are so keen to lay against Belisarius. Bill Smith is one of the finest horsemen out, but he can't now-a-days be depended upon to keep sober," and with these words the Major left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

NEWS FROM BELLATON WOLD.

MAY crept on ; it wanted just one fortnight to the Derby. The mails from the North conveyed a letter that morning of much interest to most of the characters in this narrative. It was addressed to Sir Ronald Radcliffe, Bart., and ran as follows :—

“DEAR RADCLIFFE,

“There is rarely smoke without fire, and the rumours that reached us from the North were by no means unfounded, although not so bad as reported. The horse never was better ; but Bill, undoubtedly, has not altogether stopped celebrating the Two Thousand victory. It was high time somebody

came to look after him; and, as you know, he's not very tractable to deal with. Still, he will stand more from either you or me than any one else. I've got him well in hand now, and, though he is a good bit off a teetotaller, yet he will do no harm if I can only keep him where he is. I shall stay here for another week; and then, I am sorry to say, I am compelled to come back to London. Could you take my place here for the last few days? If we can only bring both to the post, all will be right; they'll take a deal of beating on Epsom Downs. Belisarius will strip a few pounds better horse than he did at Newmarket; and I like him better every time I see him gallop. If you possibly can come, do. It is a great coup to land, and we ought to throw no chance away in order to bring it about; and, though I've got Bill pretty straight at present, I don't like leaving him alone. However, if you can come, I'm sure you will.

“Yours always,

“NORMAN SLADE.”

Sir Ronald knit his brows when he received this letter. He saw clearly that, as a matter of common precaution, it behoved him to relieve Norman Slade at his post; but what was he to do? He had just been summoned to what promised to be the death-bed of an aunt from whom he had considerable expectations; a whimsical old woman, who indulged in periodical visitations of this nature; upon which occasions she was in the habit of summoning all her nearest relatives to the ceremony,—“a disappointing old woman,” as her graceless nephew called her, “who was always going, but never gone.” “If,” argued Sir Ronald, still knitting his brows over Slade’s letter, “she did make a die of it this time, I dare say it would be all right; but if, after her manner, she comes round, she would cut me out of her will for what she would term my heartless ingratitude and want of affection for her. Hang it all! after humouring her tantrums all these years, it isn’t whist to chance

offending her now ; it is like paying the premium on a life insurance and letting it drop just as it promised to recoup one. Hang me if I know what to do. I stand to win a good stake on either event. In the case of Belisarius, I know exactly how much ; in the case of my venerated aunt, I don't exactly. Which shall it be ? Which is most risky : the will of a capricious old woman, or the success of a racer ridden by a jockey whose sobriety cannot be relied on ? I've long odds in both cases ; and, by Jove, I ought to have ! for it would be hard to say which is the greatest toss-up. I am hard-up enough, heaven knows ; and it is a case of which looks most lucrative, watching over the infirmities of my elderly relative, or watching over that peculiar weakness of Bill Smith's. It's a nuisance, a great nuisance ; but I can't be in both places, and I think the Honourable Miss Shothouse has it : and I must trust to Bill Smith's eye to his own interest to keep him straight till all is over.

Norman won't like it, nor do I; but it can't be helped, and I must write and tell him so."

Norman Slade was much disappointed at Sir Ronald's answer to his note. He stayed his appointed time, and saw Belisarius with the veteran jockey in the saddle do a rattling good gallop on the very morning of his departure. "It should come off, Bill," he exclaimed, as he said good-bye, "only take as much care of yourself as you do of the colt, and I think you'll beat 'em all at Epsom."

The opponents of the favourite were apparently well informed. Whether the knowledge that Norman Slade had left Bellaton Moor, and that Bill Smith was left there by himself, influenced their calculations, it is impossible to say, but certain it is that the last few days before the race the horse became a slightly worse favourite in the market than he had been. It was in vain that the British public made him their

champion, and put down their money. The ranks of the opposition daily gathered strength, and that most ominous sign of all to a veteran turf-goer presented itself—to wit, that the more money Belisarius was backed for the worse favourite he became. Norman Slade noted this uneasily, and Sir Ronald, still dancing attendance upon his revered aunt, was equally conscious of the unpleasant phenomenon, but he could not get away, and Miss Shothouse was displaying her accustomed vacillation on the subject of her departure. She showed all the procrastination of Charles II. without his politeness; and, as Sir Ronald said at the expiration of the second day, “the whole thing was a fraud,” and that the Honourable Miss Shothouse would probably repeat this comedy a good half-dozen times before making her final bow to the public.

It was not till the Saturday before Epsom that the old lady would admit that the

crisis was over, and that there was a fair expectation of her recovery. Sir Ronald waited no longer. He took an affectionate leave of his aunt, expressed the warmest satisfaction that she was still spared to them, and, with no little irritation simmering in his breast, took his way back to town. One of the first persons he sought on his arrival was Norman Slade.

“Very unlucky you couldn’t go,” observed that gentleman; “it would have been safer; my bulletins from Bellaton are excellent, that is to say, the horse is all right; but of course my information about the man is more hazy. Old Bill has been out every morning himself, I hear, and that’s something; and of course there’s no one up there whom I could trust to furnish me with the exact state of the case. There is nothing to make one suspect there is anything wrong except this disposition to lay against the colt.

“Well, Bellaton is a pretty close borough.

Old Bill is not given to stand any prying into the secrets of his training-ground. The chances are these people don't know anything certain, but are speculating on his past unsteadiness. I'll tell you what though, old man, there'll be no harm in having a second string."

"By gad you're right," replied Slade, "I'll see about it at once, and engage the best available jockey, in case Bill is —— well —— too unwell to ride."

"Rather dull of us not to think of it before," replied the Baronet, "it will be difficult to pick out a good man now, all the best are engaged. A good jockey is always a great point, but over the Derby course it is an essential. That race has been oftener won by riding than any other in England."

"Quite right! we must do the best we can; and if Bill is only himself I'd ask no better jockey; but I'll lose no time in seeing about somebody to take his place."

It may be perhaps because it is the

greatest race in England, because it is the greatest race in the world, that whenever the finish of the Derby is a very close thing, there is invariably much discussion as to whether with another jockey the second horse ought not to have been first. In '52 it was said that Frank Butler, the victor, could have won upon any one of the first four. In '66, when Lord Lyon defeated Savernake by a head, dissatisfaction was expressed by the supporters of the latter at his rider's performance. They change the jockey at Doncaster, and the Epsom form was confirmed to an eyelash. Veteran turfites still wrangle in club smoking-rooms as to whether Macaroni did beat Lord Clifden, and whether Pero Gomez or Pretender really won the Derby. These are things to which we can only appeal to the judge's verdict. But there is probably no race more calculated to demand all the resources of a fine horseman—nerve, head, judgment of pace, &c.—than the great national contest on Epsom Downs.

As the day drew near Charlie became feverishly anxious on the subject; he listened eagerly for every rumour he could hear concerning it; and, as may be supposed, in the sporting neighbourhood in which he was quartered "the shaves" were numerous. Fresh horses cropped up in the betting who were reported to have won trials, that, if true, must have placed the race at their mercy.

Charlie was very anxious that Gilbert should write to his uncle, and once more inquire what he thought of Belisarius's chance; but the other was decided in his rejoinder.

"You don't know my uncle, or you would never suggest such a thing. If I began to bother him about racing, he not only would never tell me anything again, but fight very shy of me to boot. No, when we get up to London I'll just ask him then, and have no doubt that he'll tell me what he knows. I vote we are off Saturday, and make a good long week of it."

"All right!" replied young Devereux, "I'm good to start whenever you give the word." And accordingly the morning of that day the pair took their places in the express for town, Charlie almost smothered in the sporting papers that he had bought with which to beguile the way.

The vaticinations of the various writers on the coming race afforded him considerable comfort, as most of the prophets predicted the success of Belisarius—and with Charlie the victory of that colt meant extrication from a very unpleasant scrape. As for Bertie Slade, he was very silent; except for his companion's sake, he felt rather indifferent as to the result of the Derby. His mind was absorbed in the one question, Could this thing be true? Was Lettice Devereux really engaged to that fellow Fursdon? He would know for certain this week—aye, know from her own lips. And yet, when he thought of that, it did not seem quite so easy as he had first pictured

it. He did not feel that he could ask her the question unless he could plead his own love, and the hope that he had not told his own tale too late. To offer her formal congratulations, and so get at the truth that way, would, he felt, be a mockery—almost an insult. Was it likely that either Mrs. Kynaston or Charlie would be misinformed about a thing like this? No; he had been a fool; he might have known that a girl like Lettice Devereux would not be left to wait long for the gathering. He had flattered himself that he had a chance, and thought he had stood high in her good graces; but then he had not declared himself. Still, to be cut out by a fellow like Furzedon—a brute whose only redeeming point was, apparently, that he had money. He knew next to nothing of Furzedon, and had no knowledge whatever of the many objectionable points connected with that gentleman's career; but a rejected suitor—and, if this story of Charlie's was true, he might regard

himself in that light--rarely forms a just estimate of his successful rival.

How it would have stirred Bertie Slade's pulses could he but have known that his rival was deeply interested in this race, that he was travelling all the way from York to see; interested, but in just the contrary way. Chiefly as a means of wringing a reluctant consent from Miss Devereux, Furzedon was awaiting with no little impatience the defeat of Belisarius. He was prepared to go, indeed, no little length to compass it, should he only see his way without much risk of detection. He turned the thing over again and again in his mind, and at last thought he saw his way to assist at that conclusion. To attempt to bribe Bill Smith would be useless, the horse was his own; and, even supposing he could be bought, it would probably require a large sum to make it better worth his while to lose than to win. Then, too, Bill Smith was a notoriously queer-tempered man, difficult to approach

on so delicate a subject, and quite likely to denounce him at once to the stewards of the meeting, an open scandal which Furzedon shuddered to think of. But he might be got at through his besetting weakness, and the emissaries he employed would leave no tangible evidence behind them. Genial souls only too pleased to fill the wine-cup, and hobnob with the famous jockey, who could suspect them of ulterior motives ?

Pecuniarily also Furzedon desired the favourite's defeat. Dick Kynaston had wormed out that the shrewd speculators who so persistently opposed Belisarius were acting upon the belief that when it came to the point Bill Smith would be in no condition to ride, and that at the eleventh hour the securing of even a decent jockey would be impossible. Ralph Furzedon and the Major, acting on this inspiration, had followed suit, and now stood numbered amongst the pronounced opponents of Belisarius; in fact, that colt's victory would

cost them both a considerable sum of money. Furzedon had very little doubt that the two or three bookmakers who so persistently laid against the horse would endeavour to assist their own forecast of Bill Smith's probable state on the Wednesday morning. Still he thought that it would be quite as well if he also did what little he could to contribute to the defeat of Belisarius. There was no necessity for taking the Major into his confidence; on the contrary, it was far better he should know nothing whatever about it. Furzedon knew very well where to lay his hand amongst his myrmidons on a couple of the sort he wanted; rollicking men, who would go down, flatter the great northern jockey to the very top of his bent, swear that there never was such a horseman as he, and never such a colt as Belisarius; that they had got their very shirts on him. "And now, Mr. Smith, we'll just have a glass to drink luck on Wednesday." If the colt's other enemies

were only taking like steps to ensure his defeat, then, thought Furzedon, with a grim smile, "wherever Bill Smith may finish it won't be first, unless the devil takes care of his own. And then, Miss Lettie, we'll see whether you're too proud to give me the right to help your brother out of his scrape."

CHAPTER XII.

DIRE MISGIVINGS.

THE Derby week has come at last. The leading competitors for the great race have all got safely to Epsom, and the papers teem with reports of the morning gallops, and comment freely on how the horses do their respective work. All are unanimous in praising the favourite, pronounced to have improved much since he won the Two Thousand, and reported as having galloped the whole course in rare style on the Monday morning. Tattersall's is in a great bustle that day. Not only was there all the business of comparing to be got through ; and this checking off of their various bets

takes some little time with extensive speculators ; but towards the finish there was some rather smart wagering on the coming event. There was plenty of money both for and against Belisarius ; but, as Mr. Black had said, it did not seem to matter how much money the public heaped upon the colt there was still always plenty to be laid against him. The stable commission had been long ago exhausted—it was a small stable. Mr. William Smith was a poor man, and he and his friends had very soon succeeded in getting all the money they could afford on at highly remunerative prices. The greater part of their commission had been negotiated before the horse had made his successful *début* at Newmarket ; and, though they had not hesitated—notably Sir Ronald—to put down a considerable portion of their winnings in support of the colt's Epsom chance, yet that soon came to an end, and it was the public now who were backing Belisarius.

Outside the subscription-room, walking up and down in earnest conference, were Furzedon and Dick Kynaston.

"It's true, Major. I can thoroughly depend upon my man. Those fellows who got the hint were quite right to never leave Belisarius, and we were quite right to follow their lead. Old Bill Smith is located at the 'Red Lion' at Epsom, and well upon the drink. If the secret leaks out, the horse will be at double his present price before the flag drops."

"They can't get anybody else to ride," rejoined the Major, "at this time of day. And, if Bill Smith gets up in that state, it will be all the odds against his being in the first three, much less winning. I suppose there is not much chance of his pulling himself together between this and then?"

"No," replied Furzedon, glancing sharply around, to be sure that there was nobody within earshot. "My informant says that he is surrounded by a little knot who

wouldn't give him the chance, even if he were so minded."

"I can't think what his friends are about," replied Kynaston, moodily. "Norman Slade and Radcliffe are his two chief supporters, and there are no two keener hands on the turf. They know Bill Smith better than any of us, and Radcliffe we know, at all events, is standing to win a lot of money over it. Are you sure they have not a second string?"

"Such a thing has never even been hinted at," replied Fursdon; "besides, my good fellow, the bill of the play is out now. We know what every one rides—what all the leading jockeys are booked for. Of course, there is always the stable-boy; but we know what a muddle *he* usually makes of it."

"I'll tell you what it is, Furzedon," said the Major. "I've seen some queer dodges take place at the last moment. There is such a thing, remember, as a friendly resignation of claim upon a jockey's services. I

can't help thinking men like Slade and Radcliffe would be prepared for such a probable contingency as Bill Smith's inebriety. If the horse looks well, and I see anybody else up on it, I shall take back the money I have laid against him at the last moment."

"That you must do as you like about," replied his companion, "but I've done here. Are you going westwards?"

"Not yet," replied Kynaston.

"Then for the present adieu," said Furzedon; and as he strolled homewards through the park he wondered whether there was a chance of such a trap as the Major hinted at having been set for the opponents of Belisarius.

Trap it could not be called. If Sir Ronald Radcliffe or Slade had made some such arrangement with another jockey, they were only doing their best for owner, trainer, horse, and the public.

Charlie Devereux, incited by a lot of youthful acquaintance at Limmer's, to which

hostelrie Bertie and himself had betaken themselves on their arrival in the metropolis, had backed the favourite for a good deal more money. He had been further moved to do this by Norman Slade's laconic reply to Bertie's inquiry as to how Belisarius was. "Never was better" had been his uncle's rejoinder; but he was not disposed to be diffuse on the subject, and Bertie knew him too well to ask further questions.

Charlie Devereux had persuaded himself that he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and therefore that it would be his best policy to thoroughly clear himself; he would go for the gloves; in fact, he ran through all the gamut of such phrases applicable to the situation. If it came off it would be all right; if it did not, well then the smash had come; and if his friends would not rescue him there must be an end of his soldiering, and he would have to strike out some other path in life. He had said nothing of all this to Bertie, and determined

that he should be left in ignorance, at all events, until the race was over ; and Bertie, immersed in his own worries, took little heed of the doings of his mercurial brother-officer.

The Derby morning broke clear and bright. The sun was barely well above the horizon when the vast horde of pleasure-seekers began to pour out of London on their way to the Downs. There were those who came to gamble, those who came for an outing ; those who came because it was the proper thing to do ; those who came because other people were going ; those who came because they always did ; and that vast crowd who yearly travelled down on the chance of picking up a little money during the week in ways of which even they themselves had as yet but hazy conception. Could the racing public have looked that morning, about breakfast-time, into the private sitting-room of the "Red Lion" at Epsom they would have been sore bewildered. Seated

at the table whereon still stood the *débris* of breakfast was Sir Ronald Radcliffe; whilst pacing restlessly up and down the room was Norman Slade, with that glint in his eyes and half snarl about his mouth which those who knew him well were aware presaged bitter humour on his part.

"Yes," he said, in evident pursuance of their conversation, "he is just about in his very worst humour this morning. He can be, as you know, as obstinate as a pig; and there is a certain stage he arrives at when he is in this way when he is neither to drive nor to lead, and that is just where Bill has got to this morning. He is sulky drunk, and, whatever we may want him to do, that above all others is the thing he will set his face against."

"What sort of state is he in at present?" inquired the Baronet. "I mean, could he ride now?"

"Yes," rejoined Slade, "that is the provoking thing about it. He could; but you

don't suppose he'll stay where he is. Just insinuate to him that he had better touch nothing till the race is over, and he'd ring for more drink that minute. Leave him to himself——”

“And he'll drink all the same,” chimed in the Baronet. “Yes; I know my friend Bill, and when he is fairly off on the booze it would take chain-cables to hold him. Have you ventured to suggest that Tom Shaddock should ride in his place?”

“Not yet; I have succeeded in managing the whole thing capitally. Abrahams, who owns Hobbyhorse, is quite prepared to let us have Shaddock, providing we give him a thousand if Belisarius wins; and Shaddock will be quite content to, in like manner, stand five hundred to nothing.”

“Shaddock is as good as most of them,” replied the Baronet. “Can't Bill be brought to accede to that arrangement?”

“We shall have to try,” said Slade, “but in his present temper I am afraid not; be-

sides, you know what he is. He looks upon himself as seven pounds better than any one else. They are all given to it; but there never was a jockey more conceited about his own riding than Bill Smith."

"Then," said Sir Ronald, "there is only one thing to be done; we shall have to tie him up to the bedpost, and lock him in his room."

Norman Slade gave vent to a grim laugh as he replied, "I wish we could; and, by Jove, we would, if he was only trainer and jockey; but, unfortunately, you see, he owns the horse, and there's no gainsaying that he has a right to do what he likes with his own. He's just in that beastly temper in which he would say that he only kept racers for the sport of the thing; and that if he couldn't ride them himself he didn't care to start them. If his colt got beat there'd be a pretty row. He and all the public with him would say that it was all our fault—that if Bill himself had been up he would have won easily."

"You're right," said Sir Ronald, moodily; "I suppose there would be a royal row; and yet, hang it, I've half a mind to chance it—it's not often one has the chance of such a coup as this."

"Yes," retorted Slade, "and I'm sorry for the fool himself; he stands to win a rare nice stake, and he wants it; he is never likely to get much more riding. He is not likely, in his small way, to pick up such another colt as Belisarius. To fool away this chance will be the throwing away, probably, of his last."

"Well, we've got the morning before us," said Sir Ronald, "and I can only hope that he will listen to reason. In the meantime, I shall stroll into the town and see what's doing. It was an awful bit of bad luck that I couldn't take your place at Bellaton Moor."

Left to himself, Norman Slade pondered deeply over the situation. He could see no way out of it. He knew his man far too

well to suppose Bill Smith's sobriety would improve as the day wore on, nor was there the slightest chance of his getting quite *hors de combat*. He never did that; then again, the combined vanity and obstinacy of the jockey made it most improbable that he would ever consent to Tom Shaddock's taking his place. Norman had considered himself extremely fortunate in having concluded that negotiation successfully. Shaddock was a fine horseman, and quite capable of doing the colt every justice; but in his exultation he had quite overlooked the vanity of human nature and the infirmity of human temper. The jockey had not as yet left his room, and there was no use as yet, as Slade well knew, in arguing further with him. He strolled out into the town, and again saw Shaddock and Shaddock's employer. Both professed themselves perfectly willing to stand to the agreement to the very last available moment.

"Let me know half-an-hour before the

numbers go up, and it will be all right, sir. My horse won't start, and Tom here very much at your service."

By this time the secret of Bill Smith's indiscretions had begun to leak out amongst those sporting men who had elected Epsom for their headquarters. That the delinquent was a small, spare, wiry man, as they well knew, made it probable that he would be able to ride the weight. But a jockey who got up to ride in a big race rather the worse for drink was no more to be relied on than in any other calling in life; and there was a manifest tendency to bet against Belisarius in consequence. Slade strolled up to the course; and, though the day was still young, the early contingent from London was already sprinkled about the betting-lawn. A very enjoyable time this: you have a chance of seeing old friends, of hearing the latest movements in the betting-market. Later on the crowd thickens, and the coming across any one becomes a mere

toss-up. If it is anybody you particularly want to see the chances against that meeting taking place seem incalculably multiplied. In that stroll Norman encountered his nephew; and to Bertie's inquiry as to whether he fancied Belisarius, replied curtly, "No; the horse is all right, but the man's all wrong. Hedge, my boy, especially if you stand to lose anything to make you feel uncomfortable;" and then Norman jumped into his fly and drove back again to Epsom, to look after the recreant jockey.

Bill Smith was having a nondescript meal, which consisted of a sandwich and a tankard of bitter beer, and was surrounded by three or four blatant flatterers, who had apparently breakfasted more largely in similar fashion.

"That's what I say, Mr. Smith," exclaimed one of these worthies, "when you come across a good horse, with a good man on the top of him, back him. That's where it is, I say; here's the best colt in England,

and the best man in England a-goin' to ride him; it's good enough to go your shirt on, that's what it is; and I've gone it."

It was possible that he had; at all events there was not much appearance of his having it on.

Norman Slade pushed his way through the raffish crew, and clutching the jockey by the arm, exclaimed sternly, "Come here, Bill, no nonsense, I want to speak to you.' And without more ado he led Smith into his own bedroom. "Now," he continued, "you've just thrown the Derby away. Sir Ronald and I, as well as yourself, have backed Belisarius to win us a hat full of money. The colt is fit to run for a kingdom, and *you*—do you call yourself fit to ride him?"

"Yes, I do, Mr. Slade," replied Bill Smith, doggedly; "it's all very well, living on tea and toast, and going long walks muffled up in flannels when you're a fleshy man—I ain't. Don't you be afraid. I'll

weigh out all right—don't you be afraid I'm over weight."

"I'm not a bit afraid of that," said Norman sharply, "what I fear is, that you won't know where the winning-post is. You've been drinking for the last three days, and you've got the 'sun in your eyes' this morning."

"Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Slade," rejoined the jockey. "I'm just as fit to ride as I ever was in my life."

"Well, never mind that," replied Slade, "Sir Ronald and I don't think you quite your old self. We want you to hand your mount over to ——"

"What not ride my own horse," interrupted Bill. "It's like your d——d cheek; and who, pray, are you proposing to put up in my place?"

"Well," rejoined Slade, "I've been lucky enough to secure Tom Shaddock."

"What, Shaddock ride alongside me," cried the now thoroughly exasperated jockey;

"why, I could give him seven pound anywhere, and I should think about ten here. No, Mr. Slade, you and your Shaddocks may go to ——," and he named a place not usually mentioned in polite circles, and strolled angrily out of the room.

"That's the upsetting of the cockboat, our last chance," muttered Slade. "I have only made things a bit worse. I know his beastly braggadocio temper; he'll think it incumbent on him to take two or three strong drinks between this and the saddling-bell, and, unless we can persuade him when he has got well round Tattenham Corner to come right away, he's certain to make a muddle of it at the finish. Hard luck!" concluded Norman, "it's rarely men have a chance to stand to win so much money as we do this time, and if that fool could only have kept sober until it was over I verily believe it would have been landed."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GREAT EPSOM RACE.

JUMPING once more into his fly Slade ordered the man to drive at once to the paddock, where, as arranged, he was to meet Mr. Abrahams, Tom Shaddock, and Sir Ronald. Dismissing his fly for the present, Norman made his way into the inclosure.

“Well, Mr. Slade!” exclaimed the Israelite, “you have come to say it’s all right, and that Tom, here, is to ride Belisarius; you don’t want anything more than the market there,” and he jerked his thumb in the direction of the betting-ring, “to tell you that Bill Smith’s got a pretty bad headache this morning;” and Mr. Abrahams favoured

Norman with a most expressive wink. "I've got a few pounds on my own; but, bless you, I'd a deal rather stand in with you."

"You must do the best you can with Reflector, I shan't want your services to-day, Tom," said Norman, grimly.

"But s'help me, Mr. Slade," exclaimed Abrahams, "why it's all over the ring, they say Bill Smith has been drunk ever since he's been here, and that it will take him about a month to get sober now."

"Well, never mind what they say, Mr. Abrahams, Bill Smith will ride Belisarius to-day, and that's enough for you to know."

"No go, I see," said Sir Ronald, joining Slade as he walked away; "can't do anything with him I suppose?"

"No," rejoined Norman, "I always knew it would be a delicate point. You see it is touching a man on the point of his vanity; and the suggestion that Tom Shaddock should fill his place simply drove him wild."

"It's an awful sell," replied the Baronet,

“such a good stake as we stand on it, and, by Jove, old man, I really want it.” And then the pair strolled off to have a look at Belisarius.

The colt was pacing up and down at the bottom end of the paddock looking cool and collected, and quite prepared to take his part in the struggle that lay before him. The time was getting on, and already the saddling-bell for the great race clanged out upon the ear. There were a crowd of people gathered around Belisarius, and scanning all his points. Another ten minutes, and a little man in a light overcoat pushes his way somewhat rudely through the throng. They make way for him, for the silken cap in the well-known colours tells them that it is the colt's jockey and owner, with a face flushed with drink. Bill Smith sullenly superintended the saddling of his horse; another minute or two and he casts off his overcoat and is promptly thrown into the saddle. As he moves off with his

horse Slade walks along side of him and says :

“Trust to the condition you’ve got under you, Bill. The colt can’t be fitter ; don’t wait too long, but come right away, and stand no humbugging.”

“All right, Mr. Slade,” growled the jockey, sulkily, “I’ll come to you for a few riding-lessons when I’ve got this gallop over.”

“Pig-headed brute!” exclaimed Sir Ronald, “neither you nor any one else can do anything with him to-day. He must just ‘gang his ain gait,’ as they say the other side of the Border.”

As Bill Smith walked his horse past the drinking-booth that stood near the entrance to the paddock, a small lot of well-dressed men issued from it. They had all glasses in their hands, and two of them bore bottles.

“Here’s your health, Bill!” exclaimed one of them. “Bill Smith and Belisarius!” chorused the others. “The best man on

the best horse in England ; we'll drink his health, and good luck to him."

"Here you are, Bill," exclaimed the first speaker, filling a glass out of a champagne bottle, "just a glass of fizz for luck, Bill," and he handed a brimming goblet up to Smith, who, bending over his saddle, took it, and called out, "All right, lads, you'll see what a mess I'll make of 'em after we get round Tattenham Corner!" then, tossing off the liquor, he threw the glass back to the man who had handed it to him.

If at first sight it seems odd that nobody interfered to prevent this tampering with the jockey on his way to the post, it must be borne in mind that Bill Smith stood in the singular position of being owner, trainer, and jockey. However, even as it was, there was an attempt to stop it. Norman Slade and Sir Ronald, following in the rear of the horse, caught sight of this little crowd, and, at the last moment, grasped their design. They both rushed forward to interfere, but

it was too late; the cup was drained and tossed back to its giver before Slade could intercept it. But he turned quick as lightning upon the donor, and said, "I want your name, sir; this looks to me very like an attempt to hocus the jockey of the favourite."

"My name!" replied the other, "what the deuce have you got to do with my name, and who are you to dare to find fault with my giving a glass of wine to a gentleman riding his own horse?"

But Norman Slade had not lived all his life about town in the days when pugilism was patronised by the greatest in the land, without having learnt to use his hands. He advanced determinedly on his foe, exclaiming as he did so, "Quick, Radcliffe, call the police; I'll keep this gentleman employed till they come."

But these two things produced a decided change in the blustering demeanour of the dark florid-looking gentleman who still held

the bottle of champagne in his hand. He knew Sir Ronald Radcliffe was well-known amongst all the leading gentlemen of the turf. He knew also that the interference of the police would at once create a great public scandal, and that was the last thing Ralph Furzedon desired. Suddenly changing his manner, he exclaimed—

“You have thought proper to,accuse me of houcussing a jockey. Will you have a glass of champagne? Get a couple of clean glasses there one of you.”

“Yes,” said Norman, quickly, “I will, and a full one. I shall know then what it is you have put down Bill Smith’s throat.”

“Quite right,” replied the other, with a mocking smile, “ah! here come the glasses,” and from the self-same bottle he proceeded to fill them to the very brim. Handing one to Norman, he took the other himself, and said :—

“Now, sir, we will drink to the success of Belisarius,” and with a low bow he

drained his glass to the dregs, as also did Slade.

“ Well, sir,” he continued, “ I hope you found the wine to your liking ? ”

“ Far from it,” rejoined Slade, “ race-course champagne, and bad at that, but I withdraw my accusation. Good-day, sir.”

“ Come and see it, Radcliffe,” he continued, taking the Baronet’s arm, “ I can swear he never changed the bottle, for I never took my eye off him. I believe it to be only what I said ; but at all events,” he concluded, laughing, “ I shall know in less than half an-hour.”

They walked up the course until they arrived at the Grand Stand, and, looking into the betting-lawn for a few moments, found that reaction had set in in favour of Belisarius. The colt had gone badly in the market during the morning, but when he came out, looking fine as a star, and with the redoubtable Bill Smith on his back, there was a rush to back him, both on the

part of the public and on those who, thinking that he would have a very inferior jockey on his back, had laid against him. Drunk or sober Bill Smith was equally at home in the saddle, and, as he gripped his horse and brought him rattling down the course, sitting straight and square in his saddle, few would have dreamt that the drink was already seething in that resolute horseman's brain. That canter past the Stand done with, the lot proceed quietly across towards the starting-post, and here at once Bill Smith's irritable temper begins to show itself. There is always some little manoeuvring for places on these occasions—some of the most eminent jockeys are notably whimsical upon this point, and Bill Smith was one of these. It was an axiom of his to have the inside from the beginning, if he could compass it, and he would dodge and make unscrupulous use of his well-garnished vocabulary to attain this end; more than one of his fellow-jockeys would yield the

point sooner than encounter the lash of Bill Smith's scurrilous tongue. He was worse than usual on this occasion, and, inflamed by drink, ventured to favour the starter with some of his choice observations. He was too preoccupied in railing at those around him to attend strictly to the business in hand, and, when that functionary, by no means prepossessed in his, Bill Smith's favour, suddenly dropped his flag, instead of making the best use of his opportunity, the be-mused jockey hesitated, not quite believing it was an actual start. Even when he awoke to the fact he still further complicated matters by waiting to hurl a torrent of abuse at the starter before setting his horse going.

"They're off," roared the crowd. "Pooh! nonsense! False start!" was the cry, succeeded immediately afterwards by the shout, "It's a go, by heaven! and the favourite's left at the post." Yes, there, true enough, were the horses sweeping up

the hill in a cluster, and the favourite at least a hundred yards in their rear.

"It's all over, Norman!" exclaimed the Baronet, as he wearily dropped his glasses; "and the best thing we've been in for many a-day is chucked away by a drunken fool."

Norman Slade made no reply, he was busied straining his eyes to catch sight of the horses, and even as they went through "the furzes" he fancied that Belisarius had made up a little of his ground. Then the lot were all out of sight, and when next he caught sight of them, the dark blue jacket and scarlet cap of Bill Smith were still toiling far in the rear. As they came down the hill it was evident that the Bellaton horse had closed the portentous gap that separated him from his field considerably. Then they came round Tattenham Corner, and if ever a jockey shaved the rails there it was Bill Smith upon this occasion. Muddled though he was, he knew he was so far behind them that he could not afford to

throw away an inch of ground, and a bit of his old skill was exhibited in the way he crept up to his horses. But it was a long gap to make up, and the old patience and coolness began to fail him. Half way up the straight he began to get nervous at the distance he was still behind; if the race was to be won at all it could only be done inch by inch, with one determined rush on the very post. Bill Smith began to bustle his horse, and Belisarius, who had been engaged in a weary stern-chase from the commencement, soon showed signs that the struggle had told upon him. The fierce excitement of the gallop, the nervous anxiety to win such a valuable stake for himself and friends, were too much for Bill Smith, on the top of the drink that he had consumed before starting; he lost his head, and instead of waiting till the last moment with that consummate coolness which had often electrified the Southerners, and brought many a roar from Yorkshire throats on Doncaster

Moor, he sat down just before reaching the Stand, and commenced riding his horse in earnest. Gamely did Belisarius respond to the call, and the colt's final flash was brilliant in the extreme. For one second he threatened to overhaul the leaders, and a cry went up, "The favourite wins! The favourite wins!" but in the next half-dozen strides his bolt was shot, he died away to nothing; and when the numbers went up Belisarius was not amongst the first three.

The race is over, and Harold by the Confessor, out of Dauntless, is hailed the winner of the Derby of 18—.

Norman Slade greeted the hoisting of the victor's number with a "splendid groan," like unto that with which Mr. Disraeli tells us Lord George Bentinck received the news of Surplice's triumph. As for Sir Ronald he said nothing aloud; he was a good loser, and it was seldom the way the battle went could be traced in his calm, passionless, features; but upon this occasion I think

there was a muttered imprecation against Bill Smith, and a resolution to depend upon that unstable reed no more. As for that worthy he was half mad with rage and disappointment, his language in the weighing-room was what Bret Harte describes as—"Frequent, and painful, and free."

He poured forth a torrent of abuse on the starter, he vowed it was no race, he objected to everything in the *et cetera*, *cetera* race, he wanted to lodge an objection, he wanted to appeal to the stewards, and it wasn't until he had received a peremptory intimation, that, if he didn't quit the weighing-room without more words the authorities would be compelled to have him removed, the discomfited jockey could be induced to retire. As far as the general public goes their sympathies were with Bill Smith; they did not know how it happened, but they did understand that he had somehow been left behind, and were very much in-

clined, like Bill Smith himself, to lay the blame upon the starter. But the regular racing-men knew better; they knew very well whose fault it was, and that the famous jockey of the North had no one to blame but himself.

However, it is little use to argue upon how the milk was spilt, upon how it all happened on this occasion. The fiat of the judge has gone forth, and is irrevocable. Some rumours there were of an "objection" in the first few minutes after the race, the consequence these of Bill Smith's wild ravings. But such report met with but little credence to begin with, and was speedily contradicted. On the top of a drag opposite the Grand Stand, with some half-a-dozen other men consoling themselves for their disappointment with a capital lunch, was Charlie Devereux.

"Rather a facer, old man," remarked one of his companions. "They've got me for four hundred. I thought Belisarius

couldn't lose ; but he got such an awful bad start."

"I don't know how it happened," replied Charlie. "But I feel quite sure that he had no business to be left behind like that."

"The starter ought to be had up before the stewards," said another. "If he had only got off he must have won. Look at the ground he made up towards the finish."

"Struck me," rejoined Charlie, "that he was in rather too great a hurry to get home. If he'd had a little more patience he must have been very near winning. The horse ran game as a bull-dog ; but I know what that follow-my-leader game is. I was taught the lesson the first time I rode in public, and just as I caught my horses found I had come to the end of my own."

"Yes," replied one of his companions. "It stands to reason that after making up all that leeway there can be but a very brief flash left in your horse when you call upon him for his supreme effort."

Charlie nodded assent ; but the discussion was idle ; the one fact remained that he had lost a lot of money, and that it had to be paid by the following Monday.

CHAPTER XIV.

RAISING THE WIND.

IN one of Disraeli's earlier novels he tells us of a certain marquis and his spouse, who, finding themselves inconvenienced by the simple process of spending two years' income in one, determined to economise, and, abandoning the delights of London, betook themselves to the country with a view to that laudable sacrifice. But as they considered that the mere fact of such retirement of itself constitutes economy, and that the country was unendurable without a fashionable mob to inhabit their country-seat, which distinguished mob must be regaled

upon all the best there was to eat and drink in the land, they awoke to the fact that their scheme of retrenchment was a failure, and, as the marchioness sweetly observes, "henceforth expense will be no object." In like manner men in their early gambling scrapes are always apt to think that a little more makes no difference. Charlie Devereux's "plunge" upon Belisarius has been already rather upon the double or quits principle. And that he should feel it incumbent to back Maritana for the Oaks, with a view to recovering his Derby losses, was strictly in accord with all race-going experience; and that Maritana should occupy the same ignoble position, namely, that of unplaced, at the termination of that classic contest, was only the customary result of such attempt to retrieve his losses. Charlie felt a little sick when he saw Maritana collapse hopelessly just before the real bitter finish began; and as he travelled back to town pondered gloomily as to where he was to

obtain the necessary funds with which to settle his accounts on the Monday.

Now to obtain a considerable sum of money at such short notice as is given, from Friday night to Monday afternoon, there is no reliance to be placed upon any but the children of Israel. A large sum of money is, of course, to be regarded with due respect as to your position and securities; but, given these both unimpeachable, it is usually to the money-lender that you must go to obtain it in time. The terms naturally vary in accordance with the risk to be run. To a man with undoubted tangible property, who only requires a few weeks to raise the necessary sum, his charges will be comparatively lenient; but in the case of a customer like Charlie he will undoubtedly demand to be paid in proportion to the risk. Charlie's experience of London usurers was happily limited; it would have been better for him had it been still more limited; but

with no little perturbation on Saturday morning he jumped into a cab, and drove down to the offices of Messrs. Jordan and Co. finance agents, whose business premises were in Northumberland Street, Strand. There he saw the representative of that shadowy firm, and who, knowing his master's views with regard to Mr. Charles Devereux's paper, informed him that he thought it was possible it might be done; that money was scarce, and he would have to pay high for it; but that he could say nothing positively until he had consulted his partner in the city. If Mr. Devereux would call upon him between eleven and twelve on Monday morning he would be able to give him a definite answer. And in the event of their being able to accommodate him at all the money should be handed over to him then and there. And with such comfort Charlie betook himself back to Limmer's, and bethought himself what an egregious fool he was, and what a precious

tale it was now incumbent upon him to unfold to his father.

He had seen but little of Bertie Slade since their arrival in London ; they were both staying at Limmer's, but, whereas Charlie pretty well lived there, Gilbert only slept there. Gilbert naturally lunched, dined, &c. at the Thermopolium, but Charlie as yet had not obtained entrance to one of these monochal palaces. It was, perhaps, this that had lured him to his undoing. His associates at Limmer's were all young gentlemen similarly situated to himself, whom he had known in the first place at the University, and who had now joined Her Majesty's service. It was a fastish hotel in those days. I am talking of the old house, and before carpets desecrated the sanded floor of the famous coffee-room—scene of so many mad-cap revels, of such wild betting, and in which so many prize-fights had been arranged and eccentric matches concocted. Not a very good academy for a

young gentleman to commence his studies of life in London. He had not as yet confided the extent of his losses at Epsom to any one. Although he had seen Mrs. Kynaston on the Thursday afternoon, and she had condoled with him sweetly on his ill-luck, yet he had not even confessed to her that things were still worse than she knew of. He had telegraphed to his colonel for a couple more days' leave, to enable him to confer with Jordan and Co. upon the Monday, and received a favourable reply to his request. Very much astounded was Bertie Slade when he discovered that afternoon that Charlie was not to be his travelling companion.

"No; I wired to the chief for two days' more leave, and have got it. The fact is, old man, I'm in a deuce of a scrape, much worse than you know of."

"I see," interrupted Bertie, hastily, "you were fool enough to pile a lot more money on Belisarius."

"Just so," replied Devereux, "and I've had to go where I did before to find the money to settle with. There's no doubt about it now, I shall have to tell the story at North Leach."

"I am afraid so," said Slade; "the sooner the better, but it's time I was off. I suppose we shall see you down on Monday night," and with a nod of adieu Bertie Slade took his departure. He had had a most unsatisfactory week. I don't mean in the way of racing, for he had lost but very little money, and cared less about it. His main object in London had been to see Lettice, and in that he had been grievously disappointed. He had called twice, and upon both occasions found neither Miss Devereux nor Mrs. Connop at home. He had been more fortunate with Mrs. Kynaston, but had derived scant comfort from his visit there. That lady, without actually committing herself to the unvarnished statement that Lettice and Mr. Furzedon were

engaged, sent him away quite under that impression.

"It's not announced, you know, but nobody has the slightest doubt that it is so. Mr. Furzedon has for months made no secret of his admiration for Miss Devereux. I am sure, Mr. Slade, he has bored me to death with it. She has only had to hold up her finger any time the last six months to bring him to his knees, and—well—I suppose at last she has done it."

"And I suppose there's nothing more to be said now but to offer our congratulations," replied Bertie. "Furzedon is a man I don't much fancy myself—he is not quite my sort."

"You are quite right, Mr. Slade," said the lady, with a slight curl of her lip. "I should not think he was; but he is an excellent match, and that is more to the purpose to a young lady on promotion. I hope you were more fortunate than Mr. Devereux, who told me he had a very bad race. My

husband was in luck. He heard—I don't know how—that there was something wrong about Belisarius; that his jockey couldn't be trusted, or something of that sort; and both he and Mr. Furzedon won a nice little stake over it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Bertie with some interest. "Then there may be something in a wild report that there is flying about. It's rumoured that Smith, the jockey who rode Belisarius, was hounded as he was leaving the paddock. The man is given to drink, and was induced to have a glass of wine for luck."

"Really," said Mrs. Kynaston, "this is the first I have heard of it. Dick says there's generally a *canard* of some sort when the favourite for a big race gets beaten."

"I daresay he is right," replied Slade, "and that this report is perfectly unfounded," and then Bertie rose and wished Mrs. Kynaston "Good-bye," receiving strict injunctions from that lady to be sure to

come and see her again when he was next in town.

A very clever woman was Mrs. Kynaston, but, in such delicate scheming as she was at present perpetrating, the dropping of one stitch, the slightest mistake, suffices to destroy the entire web. From her lips had just fallen words the import of which it was impossible she could foresee. In the idlest way she had told Bertie Slade that Furzedon had profited by the defeat of Belisarius. Now, Bertie's uncle Norman was not only a considerable sufferer from that result, but he had also seen who it was that handed the wine to Bill Smith. He did not know who Furzedon was, but was not likely now to forget his face. A hard, resolute man, no one was more likely to perseveringly unmask a robbery than Norman Slade. And, if he should happen to hear from his nephew that the giver of that glass of wine had a direct interest in Bill Smith's not winning the race, he was

likely to investigate the matter thoroughly ; and, as we know Furzedon had by no means clean hands in the whole business, such a charge as that substantiated against him would mean social bankruptcy as far as Mr. Furzedon was concerned.

The weak place in the web that Mrs. Kynaston had taken such pains to weave—and she was painfully aware of it—was the fact that her fib about Lettice's engagement was in hourly danger of exposure. It was hardly possible she thought that Charlie Devereux could see his sister without congratulating her upon her engagement. He had not seen her yet, but she knew that he was bound to call in Onslow Gardens before he went back to York. It is true she had sworn him to secrecy, that she had told him it was not yet announced, vowed that she ought never to have told him, pointed out that he would get her into a most awful scrape if he divulged it. "You'll promise me," she had said, "not to

open your mouth about it; Lettie would never forgive me if you didn't hear it first from her own lips." And Charlie had sworn to keep silence on the subject. But Mrs. Kynaston doubted whether he would find it possible. Then again Lettice herself might allude to it as an absurd rumour which she requested him to contradict. She did not think she would do so; still it was a thing quite likely to happen. Mrs. Kynaston knew that Mr. Slade had called in Onslow Gardens, but she had also ascertained unsuccessfully, and that had been a great piece of luck, as far as she was concerned, and she now hoped that both he and Charlie were well on their way back to York.

That, as far as the latter was concerned, we know was not the case. But he proved loyal to his trust. He went down to Onslow Gardens on the Sunday and saw both his aunt and his sister. They thought him rather absent and *distract*, and, taking advantage of their being left alone for a few

minutes, Lettie pressed him pretty closely as to what was the matter, and then Charlie disburdened his soul. He told her he had lost a terrible lot of money on racing, and that there was nothing for it but to go to his father.

"If he won't see me through it my military career must come to an abrupt termination. I've been an awful fool I know, and if the governor don't stand to me I'm likely to be sharply punished for my folly. I like my profession, and it will be bitter grief to me to have to give it up."

"Is it very big, Charlie? How much money do you suppose would clear you?"

"I hardly know, but it would take a lot."

"Father will scold," rejoined Lettie, "and you can't be much surprised at that. I think it is possible that Aunt Sarah might help a little. Five hundred would see you through, I suppose?"

"Wouldn't be a bit of good," he rejoined. "It would take three times the amount."

"Oh! Charlie," exclaimed the girl, "this is a bad business. Must you have all this money immediately?"

"No," he replied; "but I must find it in a few weeks at the outside. At all events it has got to be found, sooner or later."

"And when do you intend to speak to father about it?"

"Well, I shall get a few days' leave, and come down to North Leach. How long shall you be in town?"

"I don't know exactly, but to the end of the season, I hope. But I'll come home, Charlie, if you think that I can be of any use."

"You always were a brick, Lettie!" he rejoined, kissing her; "but, hush! here comes Aunt Sarah. Not a word to any one, mind, till I tell you to speak."

Mrs. Connop was extremely pleased with her nephew, and full of questions concerning his military life. She expressed her intention of giving Harrogate a turn when

the real hot weather set in. "Then," she continued, "we'll come over to York, and review the regiment, or whatever you call it." And after a little desultory *badinage* of this description, Charlie took his departure.

The next morning, young Devereux made his way to Jordan and Co.'s. He found the representative of that firm quite ready to receive him.

"I have conferred with my partners, Mr. Devereux," he observed; "and they wish me to point out that we are holding a good deal of paper of yours. I'll admit that your getting into the army renders us a little more secure than we were, but we don't very much care about advancing any further money. Still, we don't wish to leave an old customer in the lurch; and, therefore, if you will write your name across this bill, we are prepared to let you have it at once; but, you will observe, that this bill is at thirty days' sight; in short, our advance is only

meant to enable you to look round and procure the money elsewhere."

Charlie thought for a moment; "I must go to the governor," he muttered, "and the sooner the better. My racing account must be settled to-day, but a month will be ample time in which to come to an explanation at home."

"All right!" he said; "I shall not want it for longer. I'm paying dear enough for it, as it is, and have no wish to pay still further for accommodation."

"Quite right, Mr. Devereux," replied the usurer, as he counted out a bundle of notes. "The dearest thing you can buy in the world is money, with the exception of experience; and when you've got the latter, you will never buy the former."

"Come, I say," replied Charlie, "I don't see what you've got to complain about."

"I don't complain," rejoined the money-lender, laughing. "It's my trade, and though it's by means so good as it looks, as

we have to run great risks, and at times incur frightful losses, still, I often wonder we have so many customers as we do. I think you'll find that right, sir;" and as he concluded he pushed the notes across to Charlie.

"Quite right, I thank you," rejoined Devereux, and, blithely nodding a good morning to Jordan and Co., he shot out of the dingy office.

CHAPTER XV.

FURZEDON RETURNS TO THE CHARGE.

THE exultation of Furzedon at the result of the Derby week was unbounded. It was not merely that he won a good bit of money, but that Charlie Devereux should unknowingly have come to him for assistance in his difficulties was a piece of rare good fortune. Find the wherewithal for Devereux to settle with, of course he would; he would have found double the amount. It was forging the very weapon he wanted and placing it in his hands; the worst of those bills he held was that no proceedings could be taken upon them for some time, but he had purposely instructed his agent that this time

the loan should be for only a month; he knew very well how quickly a month slipped away under those circumstances; he knew very well that Charlie would have the greatest disinclination to apply to his father, and he felt pretty sure that he would not until the last extremity; that he would do so at last Furzedon never doubted, any more than he did that Tom Devereux in the end would pay the money; he was running no risk if he could use this as an engine with which to induce Lettie Devereux to marry him. Well and good, he would be only too glad to wipe off Charlie's debts as the price of her hand. If, on the contrary, she declined to make this sacrifice in her brother's interest, well he, at all events, was not likely to be any loser by what he had done. Sacrifice, forsooth! There was not much sacrifice about it; there were plenty of girls in Lettie's position who would only be too glad to share the comfortable home and income he could offer them. But the diffi-

culties in his way had only increased his desire to make Lettice his wife.

He was one of those obstinate dispositions that opposition merely stimulates; how he had come to wish for this marriage he would have been somewhat puzzled to explain; so dexterously had the idea been poured into his mind by Mrs. Kynaston, that he was hardly conscious of that lady being the originator of it. She was his confidant, she approved of it and encouraged it; he knew all that, but he still failed to recognise that, but for Mrs. Kynaston, it would probably never have entered his head to seek Lettice Devereux in marriage. Now he was committed to it, and was resolved to leave no stone unturned to bring it about. The overthrow of Belisarius, and Charlie's consequent necessities, would enable him to exercise pressure at once, and he determined before June was over that Miss Devereux should be strongly urged, for her brother's sake, to reconsider her late decision. That any harm

could possibly accrue to him, from the small part he had taken in the Belisarius Derby, Ralph Furzedon would have laughed to scorn. Poisoning a horse or poisoning a man are offences that come clearly within the grasp of the law, but to simply encourage a drunkard in his inebriety, ah ! well, there is no penalty against that. But, though a man may escape all legal consequences of his acts, there sometimes follows a social crucifixion, which, with Furzedon's aims and ambitions, is pretty well as bitter, and, little as he thinks of it, just such a storm is slowly gathering round Ralph Furzedon's head.

Miss Devereux was not a little put out at missing Mr. Slade. It was most provoking : his calling twice showed that he was undoubtedly anxious to see her, and if they could but have met she thought that at all events that one question would have been solved, which she was so anxious to determine—whether he was in earnest in his intentions to herself or not. Mrs. Kynaston

had warned her against giving much credence to the soft speeches of "those dragoons." She had dwelt upon the fact that he had never thought it worth while to come down to North Leach for that week's hunting; she had ridiculed the idea that Charlie could not get leave, though Charlie protested himself such was the case; but let Mrs. Kynaston laugh as she pleased, there was no getting over the fact that during a week like the last, a week in which men's hands are generally full of engagements, Mr. Slade had twice endeavoured to see her. She talked matters over a little with her aunt, and that lady, who in her quiet undemonstrative way would have been as much pleased with the girl's engagement to Bertie Slade as she had been the reverse at the idea of her marrying Ralph Furzedon, laughed merrily, and said :

"It will be time enough to think what you will do with him when he is an avowed pretender to your hand. In the meantime, nothing will persuade me that he is not thoroughly honest in his admiration. It

may be that he don't quite see the ways and means. I think, for the present, it is a case for suspending judgment, my dear. It is very unlucky our being out upon each occasion that he called."

Miss Devereux took much comfort from her aunt's counsel. Gilbert Slade would no doubt contrive to see her before the season was over. York was no distance from London, and he would find little difficulty in obtaining leave, if he wished for it.

But there was another thing which, just now, occasioned Lettie considerable annoyance. Thanks to Mrs. Kynaston's malicious tongue, the report of her engagement had been spread pretty widely amongst her friends and acquaintance. She was constantly exposed to most embarrassing remarks from her friends. One of these, for instance, would whisper into her ear no end of congratulations. "I am so glad, dear." And when Miss Devereux retorted, "Congratulations — what about? I am sure I

‘don’t understand you,” the other would reply, “I beg pardon; I’m sure I’ve no wish to be premature, but I thought it was quite an open secret!”

In vain did Lettie try to combat all such felicitations; it was useless; the rumour was too strong for her. It had spread about that she was engaged to be married to Mr. Furzedon, and the world refused to believe anything else. On the contrary, it scolded Lettie behind her back for denying it. “Such nonsense!” remarked her friends. “Why cannot she openly announce it? What on earth can she want to make a secret and a mystery of it for?” Mr. Furzedon, too, contributed not a little to this belief. He contrived to obtain most accurate information of Miss Devereux’s movements, and wherever Lettice went, there, if he could manage it, was Mr. Furzedon. He played his *rôle*, too, perfectly on such occasions; he was not so obtrusive in his attentions as to give the girl any opportu-

nity of sharply declining them. He was scrupulously polite—rather too formally so, people said, for an affianced lover; but he was always there *en evidence*, and giving the idea that he was in attendance on Miss Devereux. Lettie chafed terribly under what she considered this persecution, but she was powerless to put an end to it, unless she gave up society altogether. Mr. Furzedon was far too cunning to allow her to come to an explanation, and bore the rebuffs he occasionally encountered with imperturbable serenity.

In the meantime Miss Devereux was also much troubled in her mind at not hearing from Charlie. As the month of June slipped by and brought no letter, she began to fear that he had committed some still greater folly than before; debts don't pay themselves, and Charlie had no one to go to except his father or Mrs. Connop, and in either case Lettice felt sure that she would have heard of it. What was he doing? He

had told her himself that the settlement of his liabilities admitted of little delay, and still, oddly enough, she heard nothing whatever of him. He had promised to write; and, bad correspondent though he was, yet, upon this occasion, she did think he would have kept his word. She had no idea that Charlie or Mr. Slade had heard anything of this silly report about her engagement. It had never crossed her mind that this rumour had reached York. Charlie never mentioned that he corresponded with Mrs. Kynaston; nor had he seen fit to tell her of that visit to town some few weeks back. Lettie's friendship with Mrs. Kynaston had rather cooled of late, and, indeed, would have cooled considerably more still if that lady would have allowed it to do so, but Mrs. Kynaston had no idea of that. It did not suit her at all to have any breach with the Devereuxes; and when accused of the mischief she had done by her foolish speaking—for Lettie indignantly taxed her with having originated

this report concerning herself and Mr. Furzedon—she was full of apologies for the mischief she had unwittingly done. She denied emphatically that she was the founder of the story; she had heard it—well, she really could not say where, how, or from whom; and she admitted that she had been indiscreet enough to mention it to two or three people. Lettie knew that she had always told her that she might be Mrs. Furzedon if she willed; she really thought it would come about; and that, though not announced, it was quite an open secret. She was so sorry if she had done wrong; but she honestly believed that a more harmless bit of news she had never passed on in society; and, more than that, she was only sorry to hear it was not true. In short, Mrs. Kynaston would not quarrel, and therefore Letty was compelled to some extent to continue the old friendship.

Mr. Furzedon had never made his appearance in Onslow Gardens since his failure;

but one morning towards the end of May Lettie received a note from him to say that he would call about three in the afternoon, and most earnestly entreating her to see him alone, if not otherwise engaged. When Miss Devereux showed this letter to her aunt, Mrs. Connop's bristles were all on end.

"It's ridiculous, Lettie," she said, "no wonder this report still continues about you both, no wonder he still dangles about you as far as he dare. I never asked you particulars; but I certainly did understand that you had said no to him decisively. Of course the man is coming down here to ask you the same question over again. Now, do be resolute this time, and send him about his business."

The afternoon came. The drawing-room was duly given up to Miss Devereux, and a very few minutes after three Mr. Furzedon was announced.

"I would not have intruded upon you," he observed, "except in the interests of

your family. Your brother Charlie is a very dear friend of mine; are you aware that he is in most serious money difficulties?"

"He told me as much," replied Lettice, "but won't you sit down."

Furzedon took advantage of her invitation. "You are hardly aware," he continued, "I dare say, of what a very serious business this really is. I have learnt it, quite lately, and by accident; it seems he was not only heavily embarrassed at Cambridge, but he has further lost a great deal of money on this last Derby. He has borrowed the money at short notice to pay his Derby losses, and this money he will have to find almost immediately. He further has the Cambridge liabilities hanging over his head, and the whole thing, Miss Devereux, unless satisfactorily settled by somebody, involves the complete ruin of his career. May I ask if he has confessed this state of things to his father?"

“Allow me to ask, Mr. Furzedon, if you are in my brother’s confidence?”

“No; it would be better for him if I were; but of course, as he has not thought proper to confide his troubles to me, it is impossible for me to speak to him about them.”

“Still, Mr. Furzedon, I do not as yet see the object of this interview. You are not in my brother’s confidence, and acknowledge you have no claim to interfere, why then come down to discuss the subject with me?”

“Because, as you know very well, it only rests with you to give me the best of all possible rights to interfere; I am very fond of Charlie, and could wish nothing better than to save him in this crisis. As his brother-in-law, I could step in at once; before a week was out he should be free from all his embarrassments, only give me the authority I humbly sued for the other day; be my wife, Miss Devereux. You

may not feel towards me now as I would wish, but my devotion must conquer, and I am content to wait for the love of which I shall be so proud."

"No, no!" she cried, "I told you before that I cannot do this thing. Thank you, Mr. Furzedon, for the compliment you have paid me, but I cannot marry you."

"Then you refuse to save your brother from ruin at the outset of his career," rejoined Furzedon, slowly.

"You have no right to say so!" she exclaimed, vehemently. "It is himself has wrought his own undoing. He can hardly expect me to save him from the consequences of his own folly."

"That is exactly what I appeal to you to do, to save him from the consequences of his own madness."

Furzedon had indirectly been the original cause of Charles Devereux's difficulties: he it was who had first persuaded him—Charlie—to go to Newmarket; and his example, how-

ever unintentionally, it was that had led him into betting so much more heavily than he could afford.

“ You have had your answer, sir,” replied Lettie, after a pause. “ It is unfair, ungenerous, to press me further on the subject.”

“ I can do no more,” replied Furzedon, rising ; “ but, believe me, unless your father comes to the rescue, Charlie’s soldiering days are numbered. He would have to fly the country, for his commission money will not suffice to satisfy his creditors.”

“ And no doubt his father will pay his debts for him,” said Lettie, proudly, and with a confidence which she was far from feeling; and then Miss Devereux made him a rather ceremonious bend, as an intimation that their interview was over.

“ I’m sorry you can’t think better of me. I would have saved Charlie if I could, for his own sake. I should have been doubly pleased to have done so for yours. Good-bye, Miss Devereux. You have twice said

‘No’ to an honest love ; I can only say now, may all happiness await you ! ”

Very pretty words, but Lettice thought she detected a malicious sneer in the tone. It might have been merely her own fancy ; still it stung her pride, and made her feel that this man had, after all, been merely bargaining for her hand.

“ Thank you,” she replied, bitterly ; “ whatever your regard for Charlie may be I strongly advise you not to let my brother know that you considered his sister’s hand a fair equivalent for the liquidation of his debts.”

Fursdon muttered something in reply, to the effect that she was not doing him justice, and then retired, rebuffed, but by no means disheartened. He had not been unduly sanguine, and, though there could be no doubt that he had met this time with a most unqualified refusal, yet he had no intention of abandoning his suit.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE USURER'S FANGS.

BERTIE SLADE is back in York, and is strongly impressed with that feeling which comes to all of us when the world is not running quite to our liking—that all is vanity. He has no doubt now of Miss Devereux's engagement; and yet, as a matter of fact, he has no more grounds to go upon than when he went up to London. Mrs Kynaston had told Charlie that it was so then, Mrs. Kynaston has told him that it is so now; analysed, the whole story rests, as it has done from the first, on Mrs. Kynaston's word. Bertie Slade is by nature a cool, resolute, clear-headed man; but it is seldom

that those points stand to one in a case of this kind; and it was not until he found himself forestalled, and that another had stolen his love, that he became the least aware of how deeply his feelings were involved. He took it as men of his type do: he was, perhaps, a little quieter, a little graver in manner, but otherwise no one would have guessed that a great trouble was upon him, and that he had lost, as he believed, a bigger stake than any of the wild gamblers on Epsom Downs.

There are men who make plaint of their misfortunes on love's tangled pathways, who carry their hearts on their sleeves, and call upon all those they come across to condole with them upon Chlœe's fickleness; men who carry their tale of woe in their faces, but whose wounds are only skin-deep; a man who would weep in response to the question of the American humourist—"Has calico proved deceitful?" But Bertie Slade was not of this kind; he might not show it,

but, nevertheless, he felt the loss of Lettice Devereux very bitterly. Then he wondered what on earth Charlie meant to do; he had got to like the boy very much, and knew that he must be hovering on the very brink of ruin. Young Devereux had said nothing to him since that brief conversation at Limmer's. What did he mean to do? Surely it must be getting high time that he consulted with his father about how his difficulties were to be got over; but no, he pointedly avoided all conversation with Slade on the subject, and to any inquiries about when he was going to North Leach rejoined carelessly, "It didn't matter for two or three weeks yet," and Bertie did not care to force his confidence. How or upon what terms Charlie had raised money to settle his Epsom debts Slade did not know; but he felt convinced that if Charlie did not take counsel with his father there would be an explosion before many weeks were over his head.

The fact was, that, with all his gay, careless, *insouciant*, manner, Charlie Devereux was by no means on a bed of roses. He, too, knew the explosion must come, and he knew further how very near it was at hand, but, like many men of his type, he shrank from all unpleasantness; physical danger he would have faced without a moment's hesitation, but he shirked that *mauvais quart d'heure* with his father, like the veriest craner does the brook in a stiff country. He knew that it must be; but that he argued was no reason that it should be before it was imperative. He rocked himself to sleep with the idea that he could not well ask for leave again so soon, and that it would be time enough for him to go to North Leach and make full confession when it was notified to him that his acceptances had become due.

But if Charlie Devereux took things easy and dallied with the golden moments it was far otherwise with Mr. Furzedon. He

anxiously counted every hour that laid between him and the next step in his strange wooing, and no time was lost when the moment arrived for setting in motion the machinery of the law. Legal proceedings against Charlie Devereux followed promptly on the curt intimation that his bill was protested, followed indeed with a promptitude that Charlie little dreamed of. He had written in reply to the notice he had received to say that he would make all arrangements to settle the affair in the course of a few days, but Jordan and Co. paying scant attention to this epistle, loosed the bloodhounds of the law without more ado.

Devereux was lazily sauntering out of the ante-room one afternoon, when he was encountered by one of his special cronies, a precocious young gentleman, always keenly awake to what was going on around him.

"Hold on, Charlie," he exclaimed, "there are two as suspicious-looking gents as ever

I set eyes on anxiously inquiring for you—they are hovering about your quarters, and have got sheriff's officers written in every line of their ugly faces. Stay where you are, old man, if you've any cause to be afraid of such cattle. Just fill your pocket with cigars, and wait till I come back. I'll have my pony round at the back door in ten minutes. If you bucket him into York, you'll catch the evening train easy. Bertie Slade will make it all right for you with the chief, and you can just keep out of the way for a few days while matters are arranged."

He had often pictured to himself something of this kind happening, but all the same the blow came rather like a thunder-clap at last. He had thought there would be more notice; he had never dreamed of its being all so sudden; still, Charlie could think of nothing better than what his young counsellor suggested; he turned back into the ante-room, rang the bell, refilled his cigar-case, sent down to the messman for

five pounds worth of change, and then quietly awaited the upshot of events.

Young Sparshot was back within the time he mentioned. "There's no mistake about it, Charlie," he cried; "these fellows are thirsting for blood. The pony will be round in two minutes, and don't spare him. You can leave him at the Station Hotel. They'll take care of him there for me. Ah! here he is; now, old fellow, slip quietly round the right wing of the barracks. Your quarters, which they are watching, are on the left. If you've luck you'll be through the gate before they know you've gone. At all events, it will be quite your own fault if they catch you. I'll see a portmanteau is sent after you to Limmer's.

Charlie made no reply, but wrung his friend's hand and jumped into the saddle. Five minutes more and a triumphant "Yoicks, gone away," from Sparshot startled the bailiffs on their post, but Devereux was in a hand gallop, and half-way to

York before they realised that their prey had escaped them. Arrived there, he found that he had just ten minutes to spare, and, having taken his ticket, thought it prudent to lurk as far as possible in the background; but he need have been under no apprehension, for nobody appeared likely to interfere with him. And at the appointed time he stepped into a first-class carriage and was whirled away to the metropolis to "make arrangements."

"Making arrangements" is a vague and comprehensive phrase ever on the lips of gentlemen in difficulties; it seems very easy at the first blush to make arrangements, though when it is sought to put such in practice it is disgusting to find that these brilliant schemes are by no means so easy to carry out. Charlie was in for it now, and at once showed plenty of decision; he only waited in London till the arrival of his portmanteau, and then at once retracing his

steps, went down to North Leach, to make full confession to his father.

He was aware that his father could lose his temper, he had seen him more than once give way to his wrath, but to Charlie he had ever been a kind and indulgent father; even when the lad got into his first money scrape at Cambridge, old Tom Devereux had made comparatively little fuss about it. He had called him a "domned young fule," Tom's Lincolnshire dialect was apt to get of the broadest when he was excited, but he supposed the young 'uns must have their fling, and that they would kick over the traces a bit. But this time, the old gentleman was very angry, he vowed he would put down no such sum as that to pay for a son's extravagance; he had paid his debts at the University; he had only the other day found a lot of money for his outfit; and, if he had been idiot enough to get sixteen hundred pounds in debt, well, he must just

face the consequences. Did the lad think that the brass was so easy to come by as all that? If it had been to start him in any business, well, he might have thought about it, but to pay for his reckless extravagance, not if he knew it! Charlie had got himself into the scrape, and he must get himself out of it as he best might.

To stay longer at North Leach Charlie felt was dangerous. When his persecutors discovered that he had fled from York his own home was one of the places they would naturally expect him to head for. His father was obdurate; time might soften him, but that was exactly what Charlie had not to spare. A line from Bertie Slade had told him that the Colonel would be as liberal as he could to him in the matter of leave. "But remember, Charlie, that after all only means two or three weeks; at the end of that time you will have to give him a definite answer about what you propose to do. I'm sure he will forward your views in every

respect, but I own I see nothing for you but to exchange to India, and even that must depend on your being able to make some sort of terms with Jordan and Co. If you think I can be of any use, say so, and I will run up to town and do all I can for you. I should think Jordan and Co., when they find your father won't pay, will meet you in the matter of allowing you to exchange. You see they have always some sort of hold upon you while you are in the army, and if they take that view of the case, well, my uncle, Bob Braddock, can be once more of use to you."

Charlie, who had betaken himself once more to town, was only too delighted to accept Bertie's offer; he was indeed mooning about in a state of the utmost dejection, afraid to show in his usual haunts, and without the slightest idea of what steps he had best take. He had been very loth to appeal to his father, but for all that it had never occurred to him that his father would not

eventually come to his assistance. Blown up, pitched into, and abused he had expected to be, but he had fancied that three tempestuous days at North Leach would have brought matters to a satisfactory conclusion. It might, perhaps, have been better had Lettice been there to plead for him; but she was still in London, and at the end of forty-eight hours, despairing of making any impression on his father's obduracy, he had wended his way back to the metropolis.

Bertie Slade made his appearance in rapid response to Charlie's appeal, and a long conference took place between the pair forthwith.

"It's a deuce of a mess, Charlie, and I'm afraid you'll have to tumble down to infantry," remarked his mentor; "in fact, to get on your feet again you will have to go on your feet. I suppose there's not a chance of the governor melting?"

"Not the slightest," replied young Devereux; "on the contrary, just at present I

think he'd be rather pleased to hear I was arrested."

"Well," said his more knowing comrade, "I'm not quite certain that would not be the very best way out of your difficulties; the sternest of parents are wont to relent a bit under such circumstances, and, if they are not in too great a hurry, the most grasping of usurers will get a little anxious to come to terms. The only thing is, that I'm afraid we shouldn't save the commission, and you don't want to cut soldiering, Charlie?"

"No," returned young Devereux, warmly, "I'm not one of those fellows who can turn their hand to anything; I shall never do any good at anything else."

"Well, we've no time to lose," said Bertie. "I'll just walk down and have a talk with my uncle about it, and hear what he has got to say; and then we'll trot down to the agents, and tell them to look us out an exchange. It will have to be to infantry, though, if we're to make any money out of

it. There's deuced little difference between cavalry in India and cavalry at home, just now."

"Anything, so long as I have not to give up the service," rejoined Charlie; "I leave all to you."

So Bertie Slade walked down to the Thermopolium; and, after a little, contrived to come across his uncle.

"Come to grief, already," exclaimed Major Braddock, when he heard the story. "Hang it! I don't like *protégés* of mine going off the rails quite so quick as that. However, it seems, from what you tell me, the boy has done no worse than make a born fool of himself; and the greater part of his folly was committed before he joined. I'm sorry for him, Bertie; for he struck me as a nice young fellow. But, you're quite right; there's only one thing for him, and that is, to exchange. He'll get a bit of money to go into a line regiment, and we must turn the screw on his father, and induce him to

pay up a bit for him. As for the exchange part of it, you'll probably not want my help. If there is any hitch about it, I'll do what I can. I'll tell you what more I'll do. I'll not only write myself, but I'll write to your chief, and get him also to pen a letter to old Mr. Devereux, urging him to do what he can to save a promising young fellow from having to give up a profession he was made for. Tell the young one to keep up his spirits, and let me know what you've done about the exchange as soon as possible. In the meantime, take my advice, get young Devereux across the water as soon as may be. Let him wait at Boulogne while we arrange matters for him."

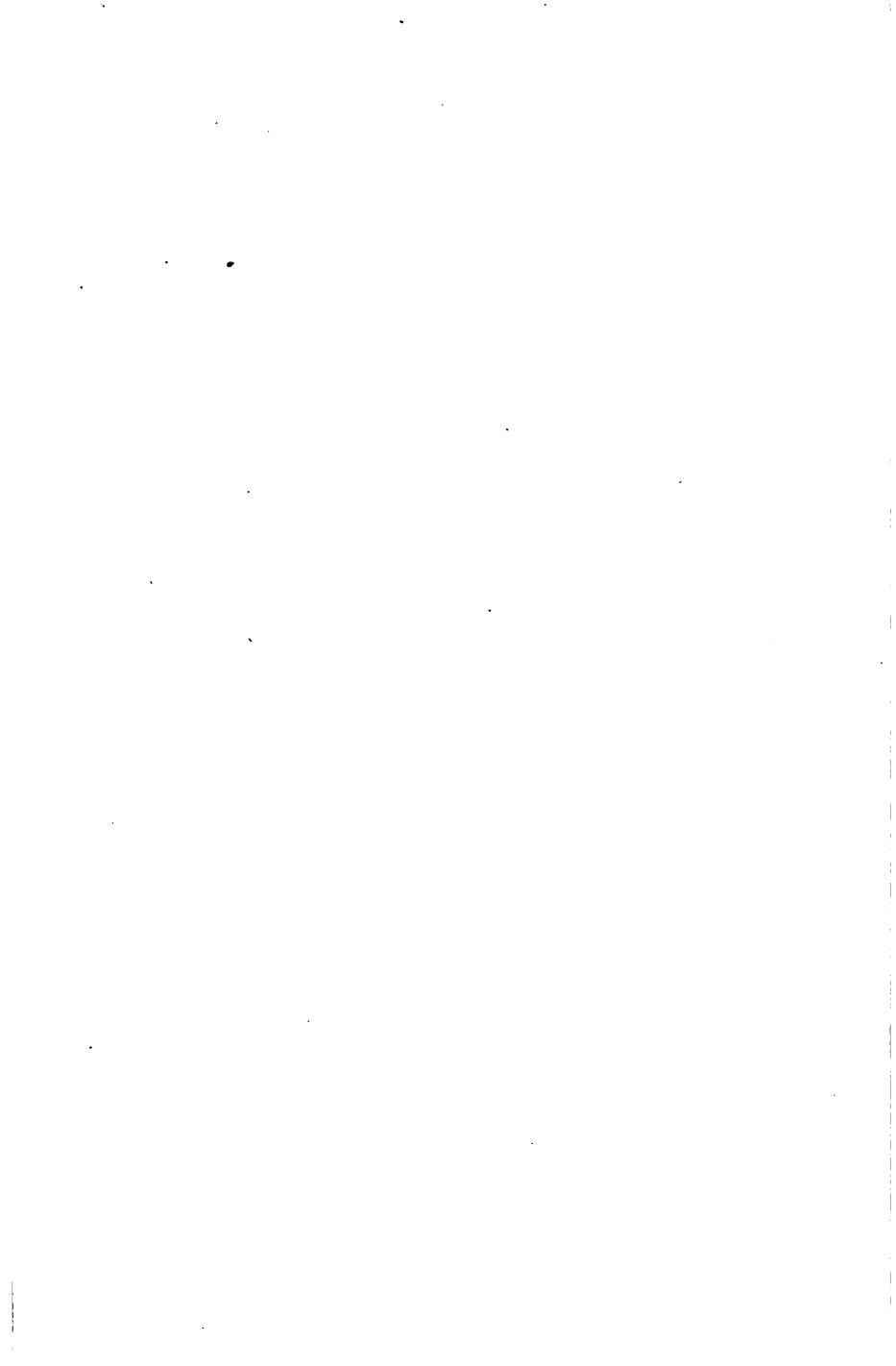
As Bertie Slade said, when he got back, "It was worth going to have a talk with uncle Bob, Charlie. That last tip of his was well worth having; we shall make much better terms with Jordan & Co. when they find that you are beyond their reach."

END OF VOL. II.

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